

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE
SRINAGAR
LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

TO THE READER.

K'INDLY use this book very carefully. If the book is disfigured or marked or written on while in your possession the book will have to be replaced by a new copy or paid for. In case the book be a volume of set of which single volumes are not available the price of the whole set will be realized.

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE LIBRARY

Class No;.....F823.91.....

Book No:.....H 12 S.....

Acc. No:.....10702.....

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE
SRINAGAR
LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

SCHOOLBOY GRIT

By the same Author

SHEEPY WILSON

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE
SRINAGAR
LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____



SHOULDER HIGH THEY BORE HIM

SCHOOLBOY GRIT

BY

GUNBY HADATH



London

NISBET & CO. LTD.

22 BERNERS STREET, W.1

E823.71

H12.1

10702

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. A QUEER START	1
II. PRINGLE'S IDEA OF HUMOUR.	11
III. DERRY WRITES A NOTE	25
IV. SIR PATRICK FORGETS TO CLOSE THE DOOR	31
V. PRINGLE BUYS A CHRISTMAS CARD	50
VI. THE SENTIMENTS OF BUTTERICK MINOR	61
VII. WHAT CAME OF TAKING A SHORT CUT	75
VIII. MOTHER NATURE'S WAY	84
IX. A FEW REMARKS FROM MR. EAGLE	99
X. A PROMISE AND A PROBLEM.	108
XI. A TRADITION IN JEOPARDY	121
XII. THE BLOSSOMING OF BUTTERICK	135
XIII. A CROSS-EXAMINATION	140
XIV. TOM BEGINS TO PAY BACK AN OLD DEBT.	162
XV. UNDER A CLOUD.	173
XVI. BRASH MISTAKES HIS MAN	199

CHAP.		PAGE
XVII.	THE MANTLE OF ELIJAH	201
XVIII.	<i>VERSUS</i> LITTLETON	212
XIX.	DAMOCLES DEFIES THE SWORD	228
XX.	<i>RUAT CÆLUM!</i>	244
XXI.	THE RESULT OF THE DRAWFORD	251
XXII.	A VERY PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION	261
XXIII.	SIR PATRICK TAKES THE FIELD	271
XXIV.	WHICH GIVES THE MORALIST HIS OPPORTUNITY	282
	EPILOGUE	291

ILLUSTRATIONS

SHOULDER HIGH THEY BORE HIM (<i>see p. 241</i>)	. <i>Frontispiece</i>
WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY COMING HERE?	<i>Facing p. 22</i>
A SHOUT BEHIND HAILED HIM	„ 78
SOMETHING PASSED FROM THE BOY'S HAND	„ 113

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE
SRINAGAR
LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

SCHOOLBOY GRIT

CHAPTER I

A QUEER START

"I AM so grateful to you, Mr. Cyril!"

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Strong. I'll look after him. Good-bye!"

The porters slammed the doors: the guard raised his flag: the inevitable eleventh-hour-and-fifty-ninth-minute passenger flung his panting person into the first carriage within reach—and the elder of the two boys drew up the window and settled himself to take stock of his companion.

Both were dressed in dark grey flannels and wide straws, yet the difference in their bearing was considerable, and much more marked than any disparity in age would have suggested. Nor was this dissimilarity attributable to the circumstance that whereas one was returning over familiar ground to familiar scenes, to the other the slam of the carriage door announced a launch into the unknown. The elder, sharp-featured and emotionless, leaned

back in his corner with a pose that fitted naturally into the picture, and suggested one who is perfectly satisfied with himself and his appearance.

By comparison, the other seemed raw and awkward. Sturdy and well built, he bore himself restlessly under his elder's scrutiny, fidgeting on his seat, and palpably self-conscious. He was uneasy in his brand-new clothes. He had removed his hat to release a mop of tousled hair, and display features which were wholesome and good to look upon. His clean blue eyes shone in nervous eagerness, expressing anxiety to please, diffidence, and, perhaps, a little fright.

By precedent, no doubt, his thoughts should have been busy with the mother whom he had just left, with the life before and behind him; with that orthodox array of dim delights and active apprehensions which are supposed to have occupied the minds of all of us on our first journey from home. But in fact Tom Strong was thinking no longer of these things. His meditations were entirely commonplace.

He was wondering how his companion managed to make his collar and tie fit so beautifully, how he kept such a lustre on his boots? He was envying him his self-possession, and the coolness with which he had bidden a

porter to fetch some paper from the bookstall, and had tipped the man when he obeyed. He was speculating whether he himself would ever arrive at doing things in just the same manner? He was mildly jealous—although he did not know it.

And then, turning to the window to avoid the other's gaze, his eyes were brightened by sweet meadows and green hedges, and he followed eagerly the movements of a mare and her foal as they galloped, heads high, from the thunder of the train. And that recalled. . . .

"Hi! wake up, kid! We shall be at the junction soon. We change there for the Claybury train."

"Yes, Cyril."

"And, I say! You mustn't call me Cyril, you know."

"No?"

"No! Only Brash. Don't forget!"

"Yes, Brash."

Cyril Brash, well in his second year at Claybury, was a self-possessed veteran of fifteen, but he grew conscious of some difficulty in leading his laconic charge to the lines of the conversation which he desired to pursue. He hesitated, gazed out of the window in his turn; at last resumed with less assurance.

"And another thing," he remarked; "if I

were you, I shouldn't . . . tell the fellows . . . er . . . too much about . . . things."

"How?" asked the other gravely.

"Oh, about yourself, you know. About how you got to Claybury . . . and the rest of it."

But Tom Strong kept an earnest silence. He only stared with his big blue eyes at his companion. So the latter, feeling more uncomfortable and uncertain how to put it, went on to do his best.

"Well, you see," he explained, "keep it dark about your scholarship, and . . . your old school . . . and all that sort of thing. Do you follow?"

He was very much mistaken if he supposed that the other had not "followed." The boy was no numskull—otherwise he would never have been sitting in that carriage—and he blushed red at the words.

"Yes, I see," he muttered slowly. "But why should they want to know?"

"Oh, the other kids are sure to ask you. Don't you be pumped. That's all. And, I say?"

"Yes."

"Keep quite mum about . . . Oh, hang it! can't you help a man out!"

"About what?"

"About the things—at your mater's, you know!"

There was no doubt about the blush this time. From chin to brow the youngster flamed like a scarlet peony. The moralist, with full knowledge of the lad's history, might jump in here to brand him for a snob. He might go further, calling him harder names.

But, like most of his kind who jump to conclusions, the moralist would have been mistaken. It is only in the romances of the servants' hall that a blush betrays a guilty conscience or is sure evidence of shame. In life, indeed, it rarely expresses anything of this kind; and some of our most miserable sinners have never known the discomfort of a burning cheek. They could not blush, if they were paid for the performance.

But Tom blushed under an emotion that defied analysis. He could never have told Brash why his cheeks were reddening. He just blushed—because he could not help himself.

His companion leaned forward, gripping his knee and compelling his attention.

"That's all right," he stammered. "It doesn't matter a bit, really, Strong. Your mater's a jolly good sort, I could see that at the station. Of course I'll see you through. But I'm sorry I was away all the holidays, else you could have come to my place and posted me up about things. As it is, I'm a bit hazy.

For one thing, my mater says you're the first Council scholar—her word, that—who's ever been to a big public school. That so?"

"Well, no scholarship to Claybury or such a place has been offered to chaps like me before. Last June was the first time, and the exam was open to all the boys in the Council schools in London who would be fourteen this September. I happened to win it."

Brash whistled, forgetting for the moment his dignity as mentor and protector. "By Jingo! you must be brainy!" he explained. "I guess there were heaps in for it?"

"Well, a good lot. But I was lucky."

They were silent for a few minutes, and when Brash spoke again his voice sounded lame and unenthusiastic:

"But you'll find no end of difference between Pound Road and Claybury, you know."

Cyril Brash was a product of modern London, well advanced for his years and possessing a good measure of superficial smartness. As he studied this quaint youngster of cheerful face and clumsy bearing, he was quite alive to the novelty and possibilities of the situation. Here, he reflected, was a fellow about to exchange poverty and, yes, squalor for the atmosphere of a public school—how would he tone in with it? This alien, "taken practically off the

streets, my dear!"—as his mother had unhappily expressed it in his hearing—was to be dumped down side by side with the men of one of our biggest schools. How would he, and they, like it? What would come of the experiment? For nothing of the sort had ever been known at Claybury before! Well, there the fellow was; he looked presentable, didn't speak so badly, and his accent would pass all right. Unconsciously Brash summarised his conclusions aloud:

"It's a queer start, anyhow!" he ejaculated. And the alien, reaching up to the rack as they slowed down by the platform of the junction, agreed that it was.

They alighted quickly, to be hailed by a knot of Claybury men who had been watching the train come in. There stood Phillips and Taylor, both of Brash's year, and Hammond of the Lower Sixth, pretending not to see them. There, too, were Steel and Matthews, and red-haired Jukes, "the Flambeau." And he it was who first drew attention to Tom, where he lingered in his protector's wake and tried to look unconscious.

"Cheero, Brash!" cried Jukes. "What is it?"

"Only one of the new kids," answered Brash. "He hangs out near me."

"Does he collect stamps?"

The question broke in shrilly in a thin falsetto from the background, and Brash turned at the voice.

"Hello, Butter!" he exclaimed. "I never saw you. Where's Eggs?"

"There!" Somebody indicated a weedy figure which emerged at that moment from the refreshment-room. His hair was jet black, his eyes were raven, and no sooner had they fallen on Tom than he came up at a trot.

"Eh? New babe?" he panted. "What's your name?"

"Strong."

"Do you collect stamps?"

To the newcomer's disgust a roar of laughter went round at the words.

"You're too late, Eggs, my son," laughed Taylor. "Butter's asked him!"

For Butterick major and Butterick minor—upon whom a wag of the obvious order had bestowed the obvious names—were the keenest stamp swoppers in the Lower School; they collected in partnership, and the younger would never attempt to do business in the presence of his brother.

Tom had no idea of the meaning of the general merriment, but he welcomed it as distracting attention from himself. And when

the Claybury train came in, and he found himself sandwiched between Preston and Phillips, on the smallest area of the seat, nobody seemed to trouble about him. He was suffered to draw back into his shell, whence he watched the party quietly and closely, eager to pick up anything which might help him on arrival. The feeling which had possessed him when regarding Brash now returned more poignantly.

Another thirty minutes, and he followed in their wake down the High Street of Market Twyford, and through the mile of lane and countryside which separates the town from the school. Here Brash dropped back to point out objects of familiar interest; the farm beyond the stile, where for threepence a man might fill his pillow-case with apples; Dicker's Livery Stables, whence the Army Class jobbed their horses; and "Father Wraight's"—that little shop on the right—which acted as illicit supplement to the school tuck-shop.

Entering the avenue where the bounds of Claybury begin, Tom clutched his companion's elbow and pointed to an obelisk of stone and marble standing between the paths on an island of the greenest turf.

"What's that?" he asked.

Brash's figure straightened. "That's the Memorial," he said quietly, "to the O.C.'s who were killed in the South African War."

High and apart it stood, set there for all time to testify, name by name, to an immortal brotherhood. The two paused before it, till Tom's vivid imagination took wing, and he knew at last what his feelings in the train had been. He was envious: splendidly envious. How he wished that his name might have been written there, for all his kind to read! And on the thought came another, one that set his pulses beating and his body thrilling in a glow. He, too—he, Tom Strong of Pound Road!—was a part of that great whole! As no words could have done, this sentinel of others' glory brought the truth home to him, with all the pride of it. Those men, whose memory was honoured there, had come the very way that he had come. They had worked and quarrelled and played in the very spot where he was going to do the same. This had been their home, just as it was to be his. Possibly some of the masters who had taught them were there still, to teach him. He would sit where they had sat; he might even have the desk which one of them had used!

Truly, as Brash had told him, it was a "queer start."

CHAPTER II

PRINGLE'S IDEA OF HUMOUR

ARRIVED at the porter's lodge, Tom learned that he was assigned to Eagle's House, in which also were Brash, the two Buttericks, and others with whom he had travelled down. For a moment he fancied that his mentor's face fell when he heard that they were in the same house, but he dismissed the idea as a delusion, for Brash led the way merrily enough to the matron's room, where "Mother" Miles received them. As the kindly, grey-haired old lady dispensed the tea and cake she remarked, with a peculiar satisfaction, that none of the new boys who filled her room were as big and sturdy as the alien. She had been expressly forewarned of his arrival, and it pleased her to reflect that physically, at least, he was equipped to hold his own.

Thence Tom was dismissed to seek his dormitory, which accomplished, he followed at Brash's heels till call-over and lock-up, learning to find his way about. Eventually, after a kindly catechism at the hands of the

"Old Bird"—as Mr. Eagle was known to the inmates of his house—and an attempt by Mrs. Eagle to draw him out, which was only partially successful, he got to bed at last, and fell asleep to dream that he was back again in Pound Road, where he and Brash were fighting for a scholarship to South Africa.

But Tom Strong was a proud man the next day when he found that he had skipped the Lower School, and was placed in the Lower Middle I, which at Claybury is one remove only from the Upper School.

He was prouder still when after second hour he took possession of his locker in the Junior Class-room. At the locker adjoining stood a curly-headed youth, who whistled cheerfully as he affixed to the inside of his door a white slip of metal, bearing the legend *Patrick Terence Derry*.

"Those station machines are cute things for punching out a chap's name," he observed to Tom; and added as an overture to conversation, "You're new, too, aren't you?"

"Yes," assented Tom.

"So am I. And we're both in the same form. I wonder . . ."

But at that instant a hand fell upon the collar of each, and they were swung round to observe the scraggy form and eager features

of Butterick major. He led them silently and solemnly to the table, where he seated himself between them on the form.

"Now," he piped in his thin falsetto, "you're Strong; and your name's what?"

"Derry!"

"Oh, Derry! Strong and Derry, Derry Strong—very strong. Funny, isn't it?"

Derry did his best to laugh. Tom never moved a muscle.

"Well, if you kids collect stamps, we'll swop you some rippers." Here Butterick produced a stamp-album and a biscuit-box, which he placed on the table before them. "Now, what do you say to a scarlet Costa Rica?"

"Please, I don't collect," murmured Derry.

"Then we'll start you, with a topping collection!"

"We! Who's we?" cried Derry.

"Eggs and I, of course," answered Butterick.

Presently Tom and Derry came to learn that neither of the brothers Butterick ever spoke of himself in the first person singular. On all occasions each identified himself with the other; it was never "I" or "me" with either of the Buttericks.

Their captor dived into the biscuit-box. "Now look here! Here's a French . . ."

It had been decreed, however, that his vic-

tims should not embark that day upon the career of a philatelist. For down the corridor rang a sudden cry :

“Class-room ! Class-room !”

Butterick major looked up, hesitating. The table at which they sat was close to the door, some distance from the group of boys lounging and chattering at the other end of the room. One of these, glancing round at the call, remarked Butterick. “You’re nearest, Butter !” he cried. “Buck up !”

“Class-room !” came the voice again. Whereat the collector gathered up his album and his box, and bolted out into the corridor. From the fireplace Preston sauntered to the two boys on the form.

“You were nearest the door actually,” he remarked, indicating Derry. “But new kids have no fagging their first week.”

“Thanks,” said Derry. “I see. And the chap next the door has to fag always to the call ?”

Preston explained that that was so.

During this episode Tom’s eyes had been opening wider and wider. He was delighted with their release from the stamp-collector, but astonished at the latter’s hasty disappearance to the call of “Class-room !” Now the words which passed between Preston and his

new acquaintance only increased his astonishment. He turned eagerly to the other.

"I say, Derry, what does he mean by saying we've no fagging to do for the first week?" he cried. "What is fagging?"

It was Derry's turn to be surprised. He swung round, cackled softly, then laughed aloud for the benefit of one and all.

"Here, you men," he exclaimed, "here's a chap who doesn't know what fagging is!"

"Who?"

"Rot!"

"Let's have a look!"

With a rush they came crowding round, and Tom wished that he could recall the question. But he stuck to his guns.

"No, I don't," he repeated stoutly.

Preston, who strove to make some reputation as a wag, mounted the table, and shaping his hands into the form of a telescope, scrutinised with gravity the phenomenon whose ignorance was so appalling. At last he dropped his arms, and came lightly to the floor.

"Spin me!" he implored. "O spin me, do!"

The colour had risen to Tom's face, and he might have taken his tormentor with some violence at his word had not the clang of the dinner-bell put an end to the proceedings. But he determined to have it out with Derry.

And in the afternoon he found his opportunity, when the two were alone together in the quad.

"I say," he began abruptly, "why should I know all about fagging?"

The question was a genuine puzzle to Derry. Surely every man who had been to a Preparatory knew something about fagging? That morning, in the company of the others, this new chap's ignorance had struck him as a good joke. It seemed different now; the fellow was so earnest about it.

"What a chap you are!" he exclaimed. "What's it matter, anyhow? You'll learn soon enough. All the Lower and Middle have to fag for the men in the Upper—do study jobs, look after their things, run errands; and all that. It's not bad. And very often they give you things they don't want," he concluded vaguely.

"But you said this was your first term?"

"Yes, it is," said Derry.

"Then how do you know all that?"

"Oh, I was at Spender's."

"Where?"

"Spender's! You must have heard of Spender's at Harrow? All Spender's men go to Claybury or Winchester or Harrow. But Strong?"

"Yes?"

"You *are* rum, you know. You're a lot bigger than most of us, but you seem as if you were funky of something."

Tom knew that the other had found the exact words to describe his feeling. He felt exactly that. "Funky of something;" funky of everything, because everything was strange to him. But he had been trying not to show it.

Away from the others, Derry appeared almost sympathetic.

"Are you home-sick?" he asked.

"No," said Tom, "of course not." Brash had warned him not to plead guilty to homesickness. His nervousness was beginning to wear off; he raised his head, and came to a mighty resolution.

"Look here, Derry," he began again, "I don't know anything about fagging, or all the things you know about. Shall I tell you why?"

His confusion was not completely gone, and it did not escape his companion. Very little did.

"Oh, I don't care," he replied. "It makes no odds."

"But I'd rather, if you don't mind," stammered Tom. "Because I do feel queer, as you put it. I've never been with fellows like you before."

"But you're jolly hot at mugging, or you wouldn't have been put straight in the Middle!" Then Derry was sorry, for he remembered that he, too, was in the Middle. It seemed like swaggering.

"I haven't been to a swell school, like you and the other fellows," Tom was proceeding stolidly. "I was at a Council school. I won a scholarship here."

But this conveyed nothing to the other. County Councils were outside all his experience.

"I knew you were beastly clever, anyhow," he murmured. "What is a Council school?"

Tom was puzzled for a definition, but at last he found one. "They're schools the London County Council makes you go to," he explained, "whether you want to or not. They're free."

"No fees?" asked Derry.

"No!"

Then at length did Derry understand. Possibly he remembered an ugly red-brick structure not far from the station at Harrow, and the lads who passed to and from it.

"Crumbs!" he exclaimed incredulously. "A Council school!"

"Yes," muttered Tom, drawing patterns on

the gravel with his toe, "a Board school. They used to call them that, I think. Well, I was in a London Council school!"

"Rats!" ejaculated the other.

"No! Gospel truth!"

"All right," said Derry, a little strangely. "And, I say, we don't say 'Gospel truth.' It's bad form."

But at this moment, when both were feeling quite uncomfortable, a sharp shower of rain drove them indoors. In the class-room they found Brash and the two Buttericks, disputing over a sheet of stamps. They were followed by a noisy mob of shelterers, one of whom made a snatch at the sheet in Butter's hand. Whereupon the latter thrust it into his pocket, uttering some uncomplimentary allusion to the other's head.

There was nothing subtle about Butterick major's wit. His retorts were of that broad and personal character which generally gets home. And the youth whom he addressed winced at the remark. From his bearing, Pringle might have been seventeen, but in reality he was almost two years younger. His appearance was scarcely attractive. His lips were thin, stretched over prominent teeth. His eyes were set close—far too close—together. And his conical head slanted back obliquely

from his forehead. Nothing stirred him so easily as an allusion to its shape.

"All right," he snarled, "stow it! Who're the kids?"

"Ask them yourself!" piped Butterick.

So for the ninth or tenth time that day did Tom and Derry repeat the particulars of their baptism. But Pringle's narrow eyes were watching the former closely; the lad's uncouthness struck him as singular.

"Here, you, Strong," he proceeded roughly, "where do you come from?"

"London," answered Tom.

"What school, goat?"

Tom glanced quickly at Brash, but failed to catch his eye. He kept silence, while his mind worked rapidly. He had told Derry, he was thinking; why not get the job done, and tell them all? It was bound to come out soon. But there must be no beating about the bush this time. He must put it in a way that everybody could understand, and get it over and done with for ever.

And then he did see Brash—Brash frowning and shaking his head at him behind Pringle's back. At the same moment his inquisitor bent forward, and took him by the collar.

"What school?" he repeated.

Tom shook himself free, and faced him, legs apart.

"Pound Road school!" he shouted. And again, emphasising every word, "It's a Council school, if you want to know!"

If the Head himself, in his robes and hood of office, had materialised that instant in their midst, his appearance would scarcely have surprised—or stilled—the company more completely than Tom's announcement. They surrounded him, tongue-tied, staring as if he were the object of some curious discovery. (Which, precisely, he was.) A Council school boy at Claybury! The idea was impossible—absolutely ridiculous!

Pringle was the first to recover himself.

"You're lying!" he snarled.

"I'm not," said Tom.

And then Preston recollected that the curio had arrived under the wing of Brash—and Preston was eager to curry favour.

"Brash knows all about it, Pringle," he exclaimed. "Brash brought him down yesterday."

"Oh, he does, does he? Hi! Brash!"

But Brash, very quietly, had slipped out of the room.

An exhibition of cheap jest and more or less good-natured witticism followed; everybody found something facetious to remark.

"Hi! stop him, somebody!" cried Pringle,

as Tom made a bolt for the corridor. "I like his beastly cheek."

Three or four of the Preston kidney brought the culprit back, and Pringle gripped him by the wrist.

"Now," he said, "what have you got to say for yourself? Bounder!"

No answer.

"Do you hear? What do you mean by it?"

"By what?"

"By coming here—*here*?"

Again no answer.

"Oh, all right! You're dumb, are you? Do you know what I'm going to do with you—you little beast!"

"Leave him alone, you cad!"

The interruption and its maker astonished more than Pringle. They rarely knew old Butter to bother about anything but stamps, and had more rarely seen him roused. But his interference was unhappy.

For Pringle might have dropped the matter, if he had not been smarting still under the other's allusion to his head. He saw at once, as he supposed, an opportunity of getting his own back. So Butter was sticking up for the brute, was he! Well, if Butter fancied that could help him, he should see that he was jolly well mistaken.



WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY IT?

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE
SRINAGAR
LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

He affected to have heard nothing.

"Do you know what I'm going to do with you?"

"No," muttered Tom.

"I'm going to stick you in the Museum! See!"

Somebody, probably Preston, laughed shrilly. Pringle imagined that he had said something quite clever, and continued vastly encouraged.

"And do you know what I'm going to do next?"

"No," muttered Tom, ominously meek.

"I shall cut a big label. And I shall tie it round your neck. And I shall write on it, 'Choice specimen of a Council school bounder. Discovered at Claybury by T. Pringle, Esq.'"

The thin lips were close to Tom's face; the narrow eyes stared cruelly into the blue ones.

"Cad!" This from Butterick major again.

"Beast! Try and do it!" And this from the "bounder," with the rougher accent of three months ago, while with a wrench and twist he freed himself once more.

Instinctively the others drew further from the two, all but the Buttericks, who called the rebel "good man!" and bade him cut off quickly. But Tom's next move was deliberate and surprising.

Watching Pringle warily, where he leaned

against the mantel-shelf, he backed slowly to the table. There he turned, seized a metal inkpot, and flung it at the other.

Happily it missed him. Happily, too, it was empty, and fell harmlessly from the wall.

Tom's face was white, and his teeth chattered. Blind with rage, he knew nothing but the primitive instinct of revenge. That heavy inkpots were not hurled so murderously at Claybury he had no conception whatever.

Butterick clutched his sleeve.

"Easy!" he said. "Easy, my boy! Cut!"

"I won't! I don't care. I hate the beast!"

Pringle sprang forward, glancing at the table to assure himself that it held no further missiles.

"Gutter-snipe!" he hissed. "Wait till afterwards. I'll give you the thrashing of your lifetime!"

"Gutter-snipe yourself!" spluttered Tom, and now every tone bore the stamp of Pound Road.

Whereupon Butterick major and minor bundled him quickly into the corridor, and so put an end to the proceedings, to the great relief of the company. But Pringle was not likely to forget

CHAPTER III

DERRY WRITES A NOTE

TOM'S mind was in a tumult of sensations when he went into school that afternoon.

It was the excellent habit of Herbert Lascelles, M.A. (who existed only for the smaller boys of Claybury and the extinction of his golf handicap) to allow his charges a day or two's comparative inaction before he pressed them to their work. "First I take them over the course," as he phrased it in the masters' Common Room; "I never bother them to swing until they know how to hold the club." Thus any new boy who fell direct into Mr. Lascelles' hands might be sure of some prefatory repose while he was "taken over the course," so long as he behaved himself.

Tom found ample opportunity, then, while many pens scratched softly in the stillness of the afternoon, to brood over the misadventure of the morning. The book beneath his nose might have been written in Tamil or Sanscrit, for all that he was deriving from it. Head between his hands, he leaned over his desk;

and Mr. Lascelles, with a shrewd glance at the brooding figure, divined at once how far his thoughts were wandering. But he left him unmolested.

To that good sportsman it seemed only natural that the lad's thoughts should wander. He had been informed of his history, and was reflecting, while he watched him, that the new-comer carried a stiff handicap, and would find some awkward bunkers on his way through Claybury. Would he succeed in getting over them?

And Tom, on his part, was telling himself that he was a stranger in an enemy's camp, a pariah among his fellows. This morning, Preston, who sat on his right, had edged up to him with overtures of friendship. This afternoon a great gulf of form was set between them; Preston had drawn himself as far as possible away. This morning he had been a Claybury man; this afternoon he remained a Pound Road "bounder."

His vivid imagination did him poor service here. It had stirred his finest emotions into action yesterday, at that first sight of the South African Memorial, releasing his *alter ego* from the husk of its antecedents. In such release he had risen intuitively very near to the plane which his new companions had occu-

pied from their birth. But he had fallen back again. Imagination and temperament were uniting now to declare that never could the husk be shed. That Pringle and his kind would not suffer it to be shed.

If he had been less emotional, less imaginative, less of that temperament which the poverty of our language defines as "highly strung," Tom Strong would have been spared this suffering. But, then, in that case he could hardly have got to Claybury. He might, rather, have been carrying sirloins for a butcher.

If he had seen a little more of life; if he had possessed brothers and sisters; if he had mixed more freely with his fellows in Pound Road,—Pringle's taunts and nastiness, however they hurt, could have assumed nothing but their relative proportion. But now they had grown into a mountain of injustice: a gross shadow of misery whereunder he was cowering despairingly.

For to Tom, as he brooded there, all Claybury seemed focused into Pringle. The new life was—Pringle. Each day, one to follow the other to a remote and scarce imaginable Christmas, would be—Pringle. Everything to which he had been looking forward appeared realised now. It had become Pringle.

Our friend the moralist (jumping in again)

will remark that the boy was precocious and morbid, or, more succinctly, "a silly little ass." Well, we need not quarrel with the definition. In some respects he may have been a "silly little ass." But I wonder how often our moralist has borne himself in a fashion to deserve the character before he was translated to stand-up collars and a walking-stick? Or—in a whisper—afterwards?

While Tom sat in this manner, nursing his sorrow and pitying himself exceedingly, a youth three rows behind him was conning the verses of that bard who has enlivened the pages of *The Public School Latin Primer* by singing the song of *artifex*.

This youth, lately *the* man of Spender's Preparatory, had now come to regard himself as a very tiny speck upon the universe. And it must be confessed that his thoughts, too, were wandering. He wrestled with a problem larger by far than that which the Primer poet has immortalised for every generation of schoolboy.

"Common are to either sex
Artifex and opifex,"

repeated Derry under his breath; "*Conviva vates* (What a brute Pringle is!) *advena* (Strong didn't funk him, though!) *testis, civis* (Jolly plucky beggar!) *incola* (Rotten rhyme, that!

There's something not half bad about him) *parens, sacerdos, custos vindex* (It's low down to rag him for it) *adolescens, infans, index* (It isn't his own fault, anyhow) . . . *with Hadria* (I wish I hadn't given him away this morning!) *the Adriatic Sea.*"

Then did Patrick Terence Derry tear a corner off the poet's page, and cautiously raising his head until his eyes held the form of Mr. Lascelles, he crooked his left arm and stretched it forward across his book. Thus he formed a capital screen to the movements of his right hand. Next he rose in his place, remarking:

"Please, sir?"

"Yes, Derry!"

"May I come up?"

Primer in hand he advanced to the dais, but as he brushed past Tom something round and white dropped in front of the brooder's nose. Presently, Mr. Lascelles being busy with the industrious Derry, Tom opened the note, furtively.

"*I'm beastly sorry about this morning. D.*"

Derry, returning to his place, shot a quick glance at the other, and knew that his message had been read. But it was not until he had grown up and gone out into the world that he

came fully to understand how much those few words had accomplished.

They struck like a knife at the heart of the other's despair. On the moment of his despondency they fell like the light of another day. Again and again he read them; their meaning was unmistakable. Round swung Tom's feelings, until Pringle appeared no longer the Alpha and the Omega of existence. Derry, as he recalled, had come from one of the best schools anywhere, and *he* was not cutting him. Derry, who must be no end of a "swell" at home (*swell* is still a generic term in the vocabulary of Pound Road) was actually apologising to him! Then by Derry he was clearly not *taboo*!

And this brought back another recollection, that of Butterick major. Why, Butterick, too, had seemed to stand up for him. After all, he might not be a pariah!

His heart was warming to these two, and a great gush of gratitude to Derry took him as he put the note away. And he promised himself always to remember the debt he owed to this new friend; hoping that some day he might be able to repay it.

He had put the note in his pocket; but more than once he took it out again before the end of school.

CHAPTER IV

SIR PATRICK FORGETS TO CLOSE THE DOOR

It will be remembered that Brash had slipped out of the class-room at the moment of the encounter with Pringle, and Tom saw very little of him during the weeks that followed.

In school work the two had no opportunities of meeting, as the elder boy was in Upper Middle I, at the head of the Middle School; and when they came across each other in the corridor or quad it seemed to be at times when Brash was always busy, with never a second for anything beyond his stereotyped "How goes it?" before he hurried off.

But in his growing friendship with Derry, and the novelty of his strange surroundings, Tom saw nothing disappointing in his mentor's attitude, and it never entered his head that the latter might, after the fashion of diplomatists of every age, be watching to see "how the cat jumped," or in blunter language, how the newcomer was received before he took him under his wing. He was waiting for Pringle's next move.

But Pringle made no move. He left Tom unmolested actively, with no attempt to inflict the threatened thrashing. It was plain, however, that he had neither forgotten nor forgiven; he was at pains to show himself aggrieved by the other's presence in the house, scowling at him whenever they met, and making a great parade of removing his immaculate person from the "bounder's" neighbourhood. Preston and a few time-servers of his sort took their cue from this attitude, and for a time were most industrious in spreading the news of the black sheep in the fold. At first, indeed, they had gone further and attempted a little baiting, but they found their quarry active and ready to hold his own in a scuffle. But the others of the Lower and Middle School in Eagle's neither sought to make the boy uncomfortable nor betrayed any eagerness for his society; and the big men of the Upper School, though they came to hear of the stranger's antecedents, gave no indication of their feelings to the rank and file. In one very favourable moment—when he had just made Hammond's toast to the lively satisfaction of that magnate and of Wynne, the house captain—Preston had ventured a delicate allusion to the subject. But he had drawn nothing in return, excepting a command to "mind

his own silly business" and a sharp confirmation from Wynne's boot. He did not renew the experiment.

In the delights of the gym, the Junior Runs, and Rugger, varied with a growing anxiety to avoid offending Butterick by feigning an interest in stamps (a subject which left him very cold) Tom found too much to think about to brood over a few slights and cuffs, or even to resent them. If he was not entirely happy, neither did he renew the misery of that first afternoon. And presently the keenness he displayed for football and a certain happy knack he showed for wriggling through the ruck in the *Hoi Polloi*—as they term the small game at Claybury—began first to win for him a fashion of respect, and next came to the ears of Philipson, who captained the house fifteen. And one day, to his mingled dread and astonishment, he was bidden to that magnate's study, and told a few matters about Rugby football and the science of half-back play in particular which he made much haste to record in a letter to his mother, lest, as he explained to her, he might forget them.

When shortly afterwards he was posted up for trial in The Thirty, and when at half-time he was tried for a few minutes at scrum half, his delight was something to be remembered,

and was reflected on the touch-line by the frantic antics of Derry. Finally this new and serious interest in life came to culmination on a day when Philipson had sent for him and remarked casually that "it wouldn't do him any harm if he practised flinging the ball about whenever he got the chance."

Some boys have no talent for games, and no amount of pains and practice will make anything of such material. Others by application and hard grind can be coached and trained into an ultra-average standard of proficiency. But a few there are who take as naturally to field sports as a duck to its pool and pond. Well it is for such if a good coach is at hand to counsel and instruct the first development of their genius. For many a potential Maclaren has been lost to the world of cricket by lack of the right touch at the beginning.

Philipson was not only keen on the house Rugger, but he was gifted with a shrewd eye for likely talent. He was patient, and he built for his successor. The speed, the coolness, and the pluck of the fourteen-year-old youngster were all appraised by him at their full promise; he looked on Tom's deep chest and strong legs and vowed that they should not be wasted. "If you skipper Eagle's when I'm gone," he had told Coxon

one night in their study, "don't forget that you'll have something more than useful in that kid!"

Claybury football had never been much stronger than it was that winter term, and the old Clayburians marked the fact by bringing down the best side to be collected for the annual match.

Tom and Derry, loitering with other small fry in the quad before lock-up on the Friday, watched stray warriors arrive, heard them banter the dignity of Nathan Crump, the porter; and marked the fags swell visibly at any word of recognition. "There's Green! He got his blue at Cambridge!" and "that's Smith, he's in the Engineers!" and "look! here's tubby Noakes! I often fagged for him!"—so fell the whispers of healthy hero worship.

But Derry had a greater reason for excitement; a very excellent one, which materialised next day in the person of his father. Sir Patrick Derry had come down to see his son, and shortly he was standing with that delighted youngster by the ropes, while on the terrace above Big Side clustered the school fifteen, waiting for the old boys to doff sweaters and to business.

But presently, and before the referee had

blown his whistle, Derry was off and back again with Tom.

"Strong, my chum, Pater."

Tom was shy and embarrassed as Sir Patrick shook his hand with a cordial remark, and ran a careless eye over his pleasant features. But presently an exclamation which dropped from the newcomer's lips in the excitement of the game, and the tone in which it fell, drew a sharper glance from Derry's father and a slight lift of the brows.

And now the O.C.s, led by Green, who did the work of any two, had rushed the game down to the school end. "Feet, forwards! Feet!" you heard Green shouting, for the rain had begun to fall heavily and the turf was churning into mud. And "School! School!" came back in steady murmur from the ropes. For there is no excited screaming from the throats of those who line Big Side at Claybury. Only that deep-chested bay of "School!" which falls and rises like the beat of a winter tide, and has inspired generation after generation of Claybury fifteens to play the game (and nothing but the game) in victory or defeat.

No easy job to handle the ball cleanly now. But somehow Hammond managed to get it out to Philipson, and Philipson, taking it in his stride, made fifty yards up the touch-line

before he fell into the arms of the O.C. full back. But as they came to ground, Eagle's skipper dropped the ball, and a forward following up apace, dribbled it ahead again, and then, kicking harder, raced full speed in pursuit.

"School! Scho-ol!" bayed Derry and Sir Patrick, but alas! Smith of the United Services had flashed across, and, though he failed to gather in the mud, just managed to get it into touch. Back came the O.C.s, pounding back to a throw-out twenty yards from their goal-line, and up and out the ball soared, flung to the far end of the lines, where Hammond had it again. He swerved outwards, with a quick feint, made to throw it to the three-quarter on his left, stopped in his stride, dodged in again, and went ahead.

"He's in!" gasped Tom. "No! They've downed him! . . . No! . . . he's in! He's in!"

And so he was. And Sir Patrick came near to forgetting the decorum of his years when Coxon had placed the heavy ball cleanly over the middle of the bar.

With half-time, the school leading by a goal to nothing, and the rain pouring down heavier than ever, it is possible that the baronet might have hastened to follow other relatives and parents to shelter, but the enthusiasm of his son's chum, and something more pronounced

in the eager youngster's manner, kept him by them in the rain. He plunged his hands deeper in the pockets of his ulster, shivered, and studied Tom closely.

And nothing but physical force would have dragged Tom from that second half. The panting of the players' breath, the *splash* of their feet through the mud, the dull rhythm and motion of the whole—these were music and poetry to him. (Is any poetry sweeter?) His heart seemed to stand still when the O.C.s, going all out for a win and favoured by the conditions, looked certain time and time again to score; and once, when Green was held up on the very line, his agitation expressed itself again in the Cockney vernacular of Pound Road.

Followed a long period of scrummaging in midfield, punctuated by a bout or two of combination among the school backs, or some clever piece of individualism by one of the O.C.s. The jerseys of the latter, formerly a bright array of the multi-colours of Club and College, assumed more and more a muddy uniformity, and Green had long since ceased to be distinguishable by his coveted stripes of light blue and white. But his big body was everywhere. And he it was who succeeded at last in bullocking his way across with the try so hardly won; a try that Smith goaled

with the left leg that had sent many a ball over the bars of Big Side a year or two ago.

Another score now to either side must surely spell victory, but work as they might the school backs were handicapped by the slippery, sodden mass of leather that commenced life as a football. Many a good pass was dropped at a moment when it might have turned the game.

Incessant over the struggle rang Green's command of "Feet! Use your feet!" till Philipson and his backs began to picture themselves dropping for all time at labouring forwards' toes, or diving head-first into a *mêlée* of scrambling legs.

It happened, however, that the scrum half to Hammond remembered that a game is won as often by the head as by the hands (or even by the feet of Green's idolatry) and presently, in a moment's respite while Noakes was replacing a ripped jersey, he took counsel with his partner.

"Next time we're near enough, Ham," he panted, "stand deeper. And don't pass when I sling it out to you."

"No?" queried Hammond.

"No. Take a pot at goal."

Noakes wriggled gratefully into the clean, dry jersey, and the fight began again. But Herbert Lascelles, who was refereeing—he had

been a hefty forward before he fell to golf—was beginning to look frequently at his watch. And the eyes of Sir Patrick, shivering and stamping his soaked boots on the board behind the line, shone eagerly when he observed the action.

“School! Scho-ool!”

The bay rose steady and insistent. An O.C. was all but through, but a mass of animate mud threw itself in his way, gripped and held him by the knees. “School! School!”—as a wild pass was intercepted; and “School! Scho-ool! Scho-oo-ool!”—when a loose and desperate rush took the ball into the enemy’s quarters, and down into the scrum again plunged those writhing, spluttering sixteen.

“Out with her!” cried the little half behind the Claybury eight, in plaintive agony of entreaty; then dived, and had “her.” All hands and arms fell his *vis-à-vis* upon him, but not before he had thrown the ball to Hammond, where he stood well back.

The briefest second’s interval was given to Hammond to remember, and to act. But it was enough. For while his threes’ fingers tingled for the pass that never came, Hammond shot forward, dropped the ball,—and kicked. On the cross-bar of the O.C. goal it fell;

trembled ; then leisurely toppled over and behind.

Mr. Lascelles' whistle thrilled into a long (and, I believe, exulting) blast. Sir Patrick sighed and shook himself.

"And now I think we'll have some tea," he said ; and looked round to find himself abandoned. For already Tom and Derry were steaming off to thrust themselves into the crowd of youngsters who were converging from all sides on to the terrace, where they crushed into a queue down which the vanquished and the victors must pass on their way to shandy-gaff and baths.

This ritual duly observed, the truants returned to follow Derry's father into the tea-room adjoining the tuck-shop, whereto parents and grown-up sisters are led on such occasions to refresh the juveniles of Claybury. Over the cake and jam Sir Patrick had been promising himself to draw Tom out. But with the stimulus of the game removed, the lad became shy and diffident again, and the old awkwardness returned and grew upon him. He answered the baronet in halting monosyllables, and appeared frightened in his company. So Derry was left to do the talk. And, in parenthesis, he did it very well.

So far as they go, tea and jam and cake are

no despicable factors on the road to happiness. But they pale into the puniest proportions before a certain very big and square chunk of chocolate containing a pasty compound of the cream variety, and not to be discovered, even by the most assiduous research, anywhere but in the tuck-shop of Claybury School. The story runs and holds credence among the juniors that old Claybury men still send regularly from all parts of the world for this delicious sweetmeat. Should a visitor inquire of Joe and his two sons who tend the shop if this rumour may be believed, they will smile enigmatically and turn to a discussion of the weather. But if the story is not true it deserves to be. Since no luxury known to mankind can excel these chocolate "*cadenzas*,"—and why *cadenza* has never been ascertained!

Derry lost no time introducing his father to these delicacies, and upon them the two boys and the big, bronzed one (for Sir Patrick had all the spirits and exuberance of his son) regaled with much contentment, till time came for two of them to make a bolt to call-over in Big School.

Then the third, abandoned for awhile again, had a goodly parcel of the chocolate put up for him; and turned his steps, a little thoughtfully, to Eagle's house.

As he passed under the archway, a youth with conical head and narrow eyes, who had obtained leave from call-over to fag for the old boys changing in Eagle's, came clattering down the wide, stone steps.

Pringle looked up quickly. He had marked the three together as they stood and watched the match, and fancied that the well-groomed visitor must be Derry's father. And since the stranger was hesitating and appearing at a loss, he hastened to proffer his services.

"Are you looking for Mr. Eagle, sir?" he ventured. "I think he is in the house."

"Ah, ye-es," returned Sir Patrick in abstraction. "I shall be much obliged if you can take me to him."

"Derry's father isn't it, sir?" This with a smile that was intended to convey a close and cordial relationship between himself and Derry. But Sir Patrick assenting with a nod, Pringle hurried on to indicate the door of Mr. Eagle's study.

When the baronet had knocked and entered, Pringle made no haste to clatter down the stairs again. He knew that he lingered on forbidden ground. But for him the temptation was too great. For Sir Patrick was a careless creature, and forgot to close the door completely after him. So Pringle waited in the forbidden

passage. And his hearing was remarkably acute.

The "Old Bird," a middle-aged man of spare habit, with very fuzzy eyebrows and a hawk-eye that belied the round blandness of his face, swung round from papers he was busied with, and did not bless his visitor for the interruption. Yet from his manner you must have supposed that nothing was more welcome.

"Yes, come in, come in!" he bade. "You smoke, I think, Sir Patrick?"

"Ah, thank you, Mr. Eagle," replied his visitor, taking the proffered cigar. "A great game, wasn't it?"

"Yes, indeed, or at least as much as I saw. You braved the weather out, then?"

"Had to!" The baronet laughed boyishly. A big man he was, and his head was streaked with grey, but save in actual stature he had never quite succeeded in growing up. "I believe my youngster and his friend would have scragged me if I'd tried to cut. Never saw a couple so confoundedly keen, you know."

But Sir Patrick was embarrassed. Gentle as he was big, simple and kindly, with a rare delight and interest in everything around him, an interest that extended to the rawest lad in his stables on the Curragh, the baronet was feeling something very much like dread of his

son's master. He was telling himself that he was a trespasser. A dim but pricking curiosity had impelled him to this interview, yet he was sorely nervous of appearing curious or saying something which he should not say; very frightened of hurting anybody's feelings. "Quaint old stick, Eagle," he was saying to himself. "Must go careful, or I'll put my foot in it."

The Hawk-eye of the House Master had never left his visitor's face, and he knew that he had not come to discuss either the football or tobacco. And being conscientious and precise, with a close regard for the value of his words, Mr. Eagle began to shape his thoughts to the report he might give of Derry in readiness for the inquiry he anticipated.

Yet when it came it took him by surprise.

"By the way, Mr. Eagle—good lad that chum of my youngster's! Ah, big lad too. I suppose he—ah—hails from this way?" And then to himself, "Rather neatly put, eh what?"

"I expect you mean Strong, Sir Patrick. He is a new boy. In the same form as yours."

"Oh! Ah! Yes! Interesting—very. The young rogues do each other's impositions, eh? Shocking practice, Eagle—but monstrous natural. Hails from here, you say?"

Never yet was the parent who could disguise his thoughts from the Old Bird.

"Strong come from London, Sir Patrick," he answered dryly, with the flicker of a smile. "He won a scholarship here. And he will do well with his work, if he does not sacrifice too much to games. He'll be an athlete, Sir Patrick. A straight lad, too, I think."

Mr. Eagle had concluded decisively, as though the subject were exhausted. He was not particularly concerned to hide Tom's antecedents from his visitor, yet saw no occasion to volunteer the boy's history to every curious parent who cross-questioned him. But he had a liking for the big, juvenile baronet; and remembered that he spoke to the father of Strong's chum. If he pressed the point, well he was entitled to the whole of it.

Apparently his visitor did intend to press the point.

"Eh—ah! Never was much good at anything but games myself," he echoed. "But can always tell a good 'un. Good at his books as well, eh? Better than my little rascal, I expect?"

"Less brilliant, Sir Patrick. But with more concentration."

"Ah, ye—es. Capital thing concentration—always wished I'd had concentration. But it's a gift—like music—and, ah, poetry—and

all that sort of thing, you know. But a bit queer, eh?"

"What? Concentration?"

The baronet chuckled. "Good—jolly good! But I mean the other fellow—Strong. A little rough round the edges, perhaps? Gives one the idea that he's, ah, run a trifle wild—when a colt—Eagle? D'ye follow?"

The House Master regarded him gravely; then rose and crossed to the fireplace. He raised his voice, and his tone assumed the manner of the schoolroom. Watching the other's embarrassments, he failed to observe that the door hung slightly open.

"In one sense, Sir Patrick, you are right," he said. "And in another you are wrong. The lad has never known a home as you and I understand the term. No, listen,"—for Sir Patrick was vigorously disclaiming any further curiosity—"Strong came here on a scholarship; the very first of its kind, from a Council school in London. When a Mr. Bonnithorne endowed this scholarship, confined to Council lads and to be administered by the Council, the governing body of Claybury gave the proposal most anxious consideration. And eventually they found no good reason to refuse it."

"No—no—no! of course not—capital things

scholarships," broke in the other, as if he pleaded not guilty to some accusation to the contrary. "Never could have won a scholarship myself—no brains, you know—eh what?" He had put his foot in it, he was telling himself.

"Well, Sir Patrick, Strong was the boy who won it. And subject to good character and so on he will hold it for five years. When he leaves they will send another in his place. Naturally the experiment, if I may employ the term, is one of extreme interest to all of us masters here. We hope that the boy will do well. We are not apprehensive that he will bring any—er—bad influence into the school, but we shall, of course, watch him closely. He is a trifle raw round the edges, as you express it, Sir Patrick, and you may reflect how very much will be strange and—er—difficult to him. But so far as I have been able to observe he appears quite a good lad, Sir Patrick."

During this precise explanation the baronet had been shuffling uneasily in his place, for all the world like one of the speaker's charges detected in a crime. "Yes—yes—very good lad, I'm sure," he stammered, "fine straight lad, Eagle—capital thing to have him here—very!"

"His father died when he was born, Sir Patrick ; and he has enjoyed less opportunity than most of his class for the exercise of—er—kindly domestic influences. His mother is a woman in, well, in very humble circumstances. . . ."

"Eh—ah ! Remarkably fine arrangement," interrupted the harassed man. "Capital idea—fine lad—very glad to have heard it. Ah, good-bye, Eagle—sorry I must go."

"One minute, Sir Patrick. I wish you to know all. Mrs. Strong lives somewhere off Kilburn, I understand. She keeps a small—er—shop."

CHAPTER V

PRINGLE BUYS A CHRISTMAS CARD

It was evident that great events were astir in the large class-room at Eagle's. For the room had been cleared ; forms ranged closely round the walls ; one small table being left like some lone island in the middle, and a group of study chairs in position at the end which faced the door. Opposite these chairs, and conspicuously apart, a smaller form.

A stranger, peeping in while the house was at supper and the room waited unoccupied, must have imagined from its elaborate arrangement that he had hit upon the scene of some weighty conference or solemn function. While guessing nothing of the truth, he would have been very nearly right. The occasion, though it masqueraded as a festival, was dread enough to such of those inmates of Eagle's who happened to be "New Clays" ; they found very little festive in it.

For this was the night of the New Clays' "Singer" ; the evening immemorial whereon custom has ordained that every newcomer

shall delight his House with song. If he does not know a song, so much the worse for him. He will be taught one. If he refuses to sing a song—but that has never happened.

Of course, a *rara avis* has occasionally been discovered among the new boys who actually looks forward to the Singer. But that is when he is fancying his voice. If he has mounted to that little table betraying a fancy for himself also, he will come speedily to modify his views. His comrades have not gathered to criticise his style or his delivery, or (frankly) to appreciate the beauty of his contralto; but they are very quick and ready to judge of other qualities, qualities which go further. And sang I never so sweetly, a House at Claybury on Singer night would be the last audience whom I should select were I an oiled and placid tenor from the Grand Italian Opera.

With a rush they came clattering in, each to his place; and now behold the New Clays stealing to their form apart, invoking final courage or hastily consulting copies of their words. Then a hush: a ceasing of the general adjurations to "Buck up!": and Wynne, stalking to his chair of state, the prefects at his heels. The captain was carrying a slip of paper.

"Marshall!" he called.

A fat boy, on the edge of the victims' dock, jumped up with a giggle, and climbed on to the table.

" ' My mother bids me bind my hair . . . ' "

he began wheezily.

"Hands behind you!" roared a prefect.

" ' With buds of ro—sy hue,
Tie up my sleeves with ribbons rare . . . ' "

Through space came an inky duster. It alighted softly on the singer's face.

" ' And lace my bod—iss blue, ' "

he concluded. Then ceased, panting—for he had taken no breath from the beginning—and smirked hopefully.

"Carry on!" screamed somebody.

"Please, I forget the rest," groaned Marshall.

"Carry ON!"

" ' And while I spin my flaxen thread
And sing my simp—el lay
The village seems ass—leep or dead
Now Lubin is a—way. ' "

A salvo of delight hailed the breathless news of Lubin's absence. The performer paused, the duster in his hand, and an anxious eye upon the prefects. But a nod from Wynne sent him down in happiness.

(And that, by the way, is the manner in which the fat boy became known at Claybury as "Mary.")

He was succeeded by a débutant less fortunate. For this, a pale youth with a squint and very baggy trousers, in that evil moment besought his audience to wrap him up in his tarpaulin jacket, and declare that a poor buffer lay low. Now no such garment happened to be handy, but sundry overcoats served very well instead; and the singer made quite a nice bundle when he was carried away, on his conclusion, to lie low in the draughts by the door. Chestnuts are not popular at Singers.

"Derry!"

But Derry's way was all roses. He had no voice and less idea of tune. These were trifles. To plenty of assurance he added a comicality of his own; and straight away he sang himself out of danger. A horrible old travesty it was (I wonder if any chant it now-a-days?) which he gabbled of his "Uncle Pete," who

"Buttoned his eyebrows under his feet,
What an afternoon!"

And Strong? Well, for a fortnight he had been practising for the occasion with the assiduous help of Derry, choosing, of all songs

in creation, the ballad of the Three Fishers, solely because he had once been compelled to learn the words for recitation. Derry, cocksure that he knew all about the "tune," had evolved for him a parody of Hullah's setting, and between the two of them they had managed a production that couldn't fail to entertain. But now, while Tom waited for his turn, the story of the three fishers went slipping from him.

So when Derry had scrambled down to join the audience, and two others had passed with some success, he found himself the sole survivor of the New Clays, alone on the form; and saw Pringle lean forward and point to him across the room.

Presently, while the performer before him was being applauded, Pringle came over to him.

"Funky, Strong?" he asked.

"No," snapped Tom.

Pringle dropped his voice. "When you've stood behind a counter you don't funk a table, eh?" he whispered meaningly.

Flurried and upset, Tom answered to Wynne's summons. Then Pringle knew something about his mother's shop! But how had Pringle learned?

His mind was confused as he stood upon the table. He waited uncouth and clumsily.

staring at his feet. His embarrassment had a quality peculiar. With a gulp he plunged into his first verse.

Checked once for the words, he caught a murmur of encouragement from the corner in which Derry had taken refuge; saw Wynne and Hammond pass a whispered comment; and heard a voice (it sounded very much like Preston's) dilating on Pound Road. But the guffaw that followed was silenced by a look from Wynne, and Tom recovered his drift. He finished in an atmosphere of chill, and nobody made room for him in the ranks around the walls. Brash, in whose direction he chanced to alight, appeared too intent in argument with Phillips to observe his protégé's dilemma.

Then — and only then — the poor buffer wrapped up in his tarpaulin jacket was allowed to crawl from the draught beneath the door, to be received with noisy acclamation. And so with a prefect's cry of "All to bed!" another New Clays' Singer went the way of all flesh.

Tom did not sleep readily that night. He had told nobody of his mother's occupation, not even Derry; and he was wondering how Pringle had discovered it. He fancied that it must have come from Brash. Yet this explanation hardly tallied with Brash's warning

in the train, and with his subsequent behaviour. Tom was shrewd enough to see that Brash was fighting shy of him; was scarcely anxious to acknowledge him in public, and would tell as little as possible about him for reasons purely personal.

Here Tom had hit the mark. Brash had rapidly regretted a promise very lightly given. With Pringle in the opposition he had no desire to endanger his popularity. And—well, Claybury was here: while Hampstead, his mother, and Mrs. Strong were all a long way off. A stronger character than that of Cyril Brash has stumbled in such circumstance.

Tom went on to ponder for what reason Pringle had kept his discovery to himself. It would have been brought home to him before this if Pringle had disclosed it. Preston and his chums would have gone buzzing with the news. And so puzzling, Tom fell asleep.

But during the weeks that followed no further hint was dropped by Pringle, and the term wore on with little of event till Tom began to fancy that the other had forgotten. But on Tearing-up-paper Night, the last but one of the term, he was reminded of his enemy's grudge by another sly allusion to the subject of a shop.

"I know what you mean !" said Tom, flaring up at once.

"All right," leered Pringle, "keep your mouth shut. That's all."

This was mysterious, but Tom was too busy in the gang controlled by Butter to press the matter further. For on the last night of the term the junior domain of Eagle's must be strewn ankle-deep with paper ; paper, paper everywhere ; in accordance with the ritual of Claybury. It must cover the passages. It must carpet the class-rooms. And there it must lie on the morning that its scatterers entrain, a legacy for servants' broom and brush.

So in companies of four and five, the juniors were set this night collecting paper. Old exercise books, old newspapers, old impots carefully preserved, letters, magazines ; all that was white and tearable on which the hand could fall. Lockers were raided ; cupboards ransacked ; and the contents borne to tables in the middle, where stood the row of tearers, working for their lives like galley slaves beneath the whip. As the torn heaps rose they were crammed into bursting pillow-cases, and carried off to store for service on the morrow. I wonder how many maledictions have been heaped upon that custom by successive generations of menials at Claybury ?

Now before lock-up on the following afternoon—and before the hour of paper scattering—it occurred to Pringle that he possessed an aunt, and that the despatch to this aunt of one of the school Christmas cards had always proved a sound investment. So he sallied to the lodge of Nathan Crump. For the sergeant, as you recollect, was wont to supply these cards; and he certainly fully earned his profit by the trouble they occasioned him.

Nathan's habit was methodical, as befitted an old soldier. But his process of sale was tiresomely slow. Before admission to his sitting-room he must inspect the condition of your boots: he must fumble through every pocket of his person (Nathan's clothes were made of pockets) till he found a tiny key: he must next unlock his chiffonier, with the three doors below and the white marble slab above whereon were displayed a pot of feathery grass and two claret glasses of dark blue. The centre door unlocked (it always jammed a few times first), Nathan would produce a cigar-box wrapped in brown paper and secured with pounds of string. Each knot must be unpicked most patiently. And ten to one before he had succeeded some sudden call would take him flurrying, to leave you waiting with your pennies and your patience.

Only after painful effort had Nathan Crump mastered his letters under his military school-master. So painful, indeed, that in his age he still remembered it. Therefore was he also chary of his speech, holding words too valuable to squander.

"Crump, I want a Christmas card, please?" quoth Pringle, exhibiting his boots.

Nathan led the way in.

"A twopenny please, Crump?"

The porter grunted, found his key, unlocked his chiffonier, extracted the cigar-box, and leisurely unwrapped it. The bell in the gateway of his lodge jangled at the moment.

"Choose!" jerked Nathan, leaving Pringle with the cards.

With the room to himself, Pringle had quite a nice opportunity for the exercise of his bump of curiosity. He inspected the familiar pictures of the stags, one calling from the left of the fireplace to its rival swimming across the water on the right. He peeped into the cupboards: examined a few books: looked under a blotting pad which lay, with a penny bottle of ink, upon the sofa; and so went ferreting around until he was arrested by a faded photograph perched in an Oxford frame upon a bracket by the window.

This was the portrait of a smart young soldier, evidently sitting for the first time in his uniform, and it interested Pringle very much. He reached up and took it from its place. Then he carried it to the light and scrutinised some writing in one corner; in fact he was holding it in this position when the porter returned and caught him.

Happily for Pringle, Crump came back in a good temper. He had been on an errand for the Head, and something which he had been told had pleased him. So Pringle, expecting to be put out speedily, was agreeably surprised when the old man took up the photograph from the table where he had dropped it and replaced it without rebuke. On the contrary, Crump appeared communicative.

"Fine-looking chap!" he remarked.

"Handsome I call him, Crump. It's you, isn't it, when you were young?"

Perhaps Pringle had his reasons for drawing the porter out.

"I was never a pretty 'un, when I joined," laughed Crump. "But I reckon I was a good 'un to go!"

"You must have been, Crump!"

"Twenty-two years of it, come one way an' another. Soldierin' was soldierin' in my day.

We didn't carry no feather beds an' grand pianos with us. It was pretty rough material they made us of."

"But the photo, Crump. I've seen that face somewhere?"

"Not likely," growled the porter.

"But I have. That's why I thought it must be you. You're pulling my leg, Crump?"

"Nay. A linesman he was; married into the family."

"Yes?" ventured Pringle.

"Aye; they sent me that picture out to India with word that he was marrying my sister Emily. Smart man; saw a lot of service."

"Do you ever come across him now, Crump?"

"Speared at Sarras, when Chermside cut up the Dervishes! Left lots of medals, and no family!"

Pringle seemed curiously concerned. "What was his name, Crump?" he persisted.

"Strong, Sergeant Strong. You saw it written on the picture, didn't you?"

"No, I never noticed it, Crump." (Oh, Pringle!) "Had he any brothers in London?"

"Nay, I don't know. I was on foreign at the time, you see. I never heard of any, but Emily wasn't a favourite of mine. Two cards, is it?"

Old Crump had tired of the subject.

"No, only one, please. Thanks awfully, Crump!"

And Pringle departed with his purchase. He was glad that he had remembered his Aunt. Very glad. He was fancying that his chat with the porter might come in useful.

CHAPTER VI

THE SENTIMENTS OF BUTTERICK MINOR

It was on the second day of the Easter term that the story began to circulate. Somebody had it from Preston, who had had it from somebody else ; and, oh no, there was no mistake about it. In fact it must have been discovered by one of the men during the Christmas holidays.

Nathan Crump, the school porter, was a sort of an uncle to Tom Strong !

At least, if he wasn't an uncle, what was he ? Crump's sister had married Strong's mother's brother, anyhow !

Certain ? Absolutely ! Ask Preston !

Preston, very fussy and in great demand, made no bones about it.

"Besides, you chaps," he would conclude "if you don't believe me, look at the photo in Crump's lodge ! It's Strong's image. That proves it."

"But I don't see that," somebody might object ; "whose is the photo ?"

Preston would crush him, very slowly. "The

photo, you goat, married Crump's sister. The photo was called Strong. He was a Tommy in the Berkshires. And he was killed somewhere."

"Well?"

"Well, this Strong came from London; from near where our Strong lives. Any fool can see it all."

Derry had retorted instantly that now he understood why Preston saw it.

I am afraid that Derry's wit went begging.

"All right," whined Preston, "if you men think it's anything to joke about, I don't. Nor does Pringle. It's a bit off to have Crump's nephew at Claybury!"

"But Crump hasn't said that Strong's his nephew," urged Butterick.

"Of course not! Is it likely? It's a fact, though, all the same. A solid fact."

Preston was not aware that he was lying in this version of the story. Pringle had been quite imaginative enough to persuade himself that the original of the sergeant's photograph had come from London. If from London, why not from Kilburn; he remembered that Mrs. Strong lived there. And what was more probable, he argued, since Strong had been to a London County Council School?

So when he handed on the tale to Preston, all the elements of doubt had been divested. How had Pringle found it out? That was his business; not Preston's. All Preston had to do was to spread the tale about. And do it jolly quick.

At first one or two of the more adventurous spirits angled for some roundabout confirmation from Nathan Crump himself. They endeavoured to manipulate sly peeps at the photograph. But either by accident or design the portrait was missing this term from its place. And Pringle, pressed by a few of them one afternoon to solicit one more look at it, found the sergeant in a very different mood. He was received curtly, and bidden so angrily to "Step it!" that he never tried again. The photograph had served his purpose, and he had no desire to be in the sergeant's black books.

So he instilled it into Preston that the story must be kept from Crump himself, and again Preston passed the injunction on. It was quite unnecessary. I never remember the junior who would have tackled Crump on such a subject.

But there was no sparing of Tom. He was Crump's nephew, and he must hear about it.

He did.

Were he anywhere in the neighbourhood of

the gates, his tormentors would follow, to inquire if he went "to tea with nunky?" He was ragged daily on his connection with the rank and file; T was brightly ascertained to stand for "Tommy"; directly and indirectly he found his society eschewed. Gross caricatures were scrawled and pinned upon his locker. He would wake up in the mornings to miss his soap and sponge; thrown most often out of the dormitory window; and he was subjected to a stream of petty annoyances of this sort, lacking all the humour of spontaneous mischief. There was no touch of good nature in them. When he protested, he found no one to take the challenge up.

He was not bullied openly or roughly. His strength and spirit would have made active bullying a dangerous job, even if the prefects had permitted it. But he endured a furtive, constant persecution, with a sting of something nastier behind it.

Passive and unhappy, Tom began to shrink into himself; under the buoyant ministrations of Derry he went chafing. He shirked games. From drill, from the runs, and from football he was always asking for leave-off; and the little green cards which the shirkers seek so eagerly were refused to him by Wynne on every opportunity. Wynne gave no reasons, and asked

none; he wore an old head on his young shoulders. Mr. Lascelles, too, must have guessed that something went amiss with him, his work betrayed as much. But Mr. Lascelles kept his counsel, reflecting on the "bunkers." He knew that Tom must worry his own way through.

I am not sure that Tom Strong shone in those days of tribulation; yet in one respect, at least, he showed himself well worthy of the public school tradition. No complaint passed his lips to any in authority. And though Coxon, who had succeeded to the captaincy of Eagle's fifteen, never passed him in the passages or quad without a nod and an "All right, eh?"—enough to set any proper youngster tingling—Tom responded always with a great show of prosperity. His answer might have been otherwise, I think, if this had happened in Pound Road. Coxon was not looking after him, but Coxon's hand would have fallen heavily on Pringle; and Tom knew it.

Already, then, one term at Claybury had taught him a Great Thing.

Brash avoided his protégé, but Derry stuck stoutly to his side, and the brothers Butterick pursued their own way, regarding him steadily as a client for their stamps. That the Junior and Middle of Eagle's had all but sent Tom into

Coventry was a matter of very little moment to this independent couple. They professed no sentiment upon the subject, and had no intention of fighting anybody's battles but their own. But they refused to believe a word of Pringle's yarn—because it came from Pringle.

"You see," as Butterick was putting it to Tom before lock-up one afternoon, "we know you're all right, Strong. And we're not going to cut you. Eh, Eggs?"

Derry and the others were practising for the Sports. The two Buttericks—who always "shuffled" Sports—had traced their victim to the Scriptorium, where they pounced upon him with their biscuit box and duplicates. But they failed dismally in coaxing him to even the smallest appetite for an orange-buff Bermuda. No wonder they were concerned for such a listless creature.

"No; we shan't cut you. Eh, Eggs?"

To this appeal the younger brother nodded. When Butterick major was present, Butterick minor would never dream of doing the speaking. But to make up for it, the sentiments expressed were fathered almost invariably upon the silent partner.

So Eggs nodded, blinking sagely like an owl. But at the sight of something in his raven eyes—or was it a note in Butter's thin

falsestto?—Tom's feelings, already overcharged, came bubbling to the surface. He was in that frame when the thoughts will out, to any note of sympathy.

"But why should anybody cut me, Butterick?" he splurged. "It's all a lie about the sergeant!"

The brothers laughed.

"We know it is," piped Butter. "By itself, that's nothing. Eh, Eggs?"

Butterick minor shook his head sagaciously.

"Well then?" stammered Tom.

"Well, there are other things, you know. Pound Road, and so on."

"Yes, but Pound Road isn't my fault. I couldn't help being there, or coming here!"

In Butterick major's mind a sense of elemental justice was struggling to express itself.

"No," he began, swinging his long legs on the table, "no, of course you couldn't. But . . . easy, let me finish . . . there's another side to it. Pringle's a beast; but that other side remains. We must be fair."

Eggs shut his stamp album with a snap and jumped up beside his brother.

"How?" asked Tom.

"Well, we figure it out like this . . . shall we tell him, Eggs?"

Eggs nodded again ; rather severely, Tom thought ; motioning him to listen.

"If a lot of fish in a pond," explained Butter, "all of a sudden found another sort of animal dropped down amongst them, it would be disagreeable all round. That's Eggs' way of putting it. Both the fish and the other thing would get a bit of a shock. Naturally the fish would resent it. They'd think, rightly or wrongly, that the newcomer was an intruder. Things couldn't help being awkward. If the fish cottoned on to him at once, why, they wouldn't be fish. See?"

For a while Tom puzzled over this. It was bald, very ; but it carried light. Butterick minor gurgled some large appreciation of his brother's masterly logic.

"So we must be fair," resumed Butter, when his words had had time to sink in, "fair both to you, and to them. As you say, it isn't your fault. As you should see, it isn't theirs either. It's just nobody's fault. Most chaps are asses ; and Eagle's hasn't got over the shock yet. You'll own there's something to be said for them."

"I hadn't thought of it that way," murmured Tom.

"You see, Eggs ; he hadn't thought of it that way. But he will. As you say, Eggs,

Strong here is breaking a system, a—what d'ye call it?—a convention; and it's hard work for him. But the people whose convention he's breaking feel the twist. It couldn't be broken unless they felt it. Eh?"

And this remarkable soliloquy Butter had delivered with his eyes upon his brother, averting them from the youngster standing before them. Butterick major did not want to hurt.

But Tom's face brightened. Relief had come.

"I say, Butterick," he exclaimed, "you'll be jolly good in the Debating Society, when you're in Upper. You're top-hole at putting things!"

"No," piped the other. "Oh, no. I'm only repeating what Eggs said. I can't put things like Eggs can."

"Well, what would you do, you two, if you were me?"

"What should we do, Eggs? Eh?"

Butterick minor frowned, opened his mouth, but apparently thought better of it. His brother sprawled down from the table.

"Strong," he said, "we shouldn't fret. We should carry on as if nothing had happened. We know you're a decent chap, Strong, and"—he was clutching up his biscuit box—"Pringle's no great shakes!"

"He's a beast," reiterated Tom.

"Yes ; or he'd never bait you so. But he's nobody himself, and that's the rummy part of it . . ."

Butter had broken off abruptly, apparently dissatisfied. Then he turned sharply on his brother.

"No, Eggs, we're wrong there. That's not the rummy part of it ; of course not. You see if Pringle's people were anything very great ; if Pringle himself had what you'd call breeding, why, he'd know very well what rotten form his behaviour is. Wouldn't he ? A gentleman would never show that he twigged anything. D'ye follow ?"

Here was the glimmer of a larger light ; but Tom hardly comprehended at the moment why the words brought so quick a recollection of Derry's father.

"Yes, but how about your fishes, then ?" argued Tom.

"We're not wrong about the fishes," mused Butterick. "They fit in all right, though I can't quite explain it. I suppose the fishes would feel the shock, but being gentlemen (you know what I mean) they'd twig it wasn't the newcomer's fault. I said he was dropped in, didn't I ? So they wouldn't rag him for it, but just keep quiet ; and see what he was

made of. You see they're not obliged to make a pal of him. But they are obliged—somehow—not to act like cads. Eh, Eggs?"

Eggs went on nodding.

"Anyhow, Strong," concluded Butter, for his simile was getting a little out of hand, "remember this. Pringle's a Teyte foundationer. So he'll leave this summer if he doesn't get the Drawford."

"The Drawford, Butterick? What's that? I heard Brash mentioning it once."

"Yes, now I think of it, Brash is a Teyte as well. The Drawford's an exhibition that only Teytes go in for. See?"

"But I don't see," persisted Tom.

"Eggs, he doesn't see. Well, we've five foundationers in each year. They're nominated, and come as young as possible; practically for nothing. But when they're sixteen they have to leave (it's a quaint rule!) unless they get the Drawford. The hard luck is that only one can win it. He gets an exhibition for three years at Claybury and three at the Varsity. So it's worth having."

"But Brash can do without that," insisted Tom.

"Perhaps he can. But anyhow, he's in for it next June; he and Pringle and the other Teytes. And it's certain Pringle can't stay

here unless he wins it. Everybody knows that. So he's got to buck up."

It seemed to Tom that this gave a very definite prospect of his enemy's removal.

"Pringle can never beat Brash," he remarked.

"We're not so sure," mused Butterick. "Are we, Eggs? Brash is clever. But he's slacking. And altogether we're a bit stumped over Brash!"

Eggs began to nod his head again.

"What we can't fathom, Strong, is this. Brash doesn't collect stamps. He never has collected. But he's always got a lot of rippers. He sells us any amount, and only yesterday we swopped him a key-ring and our zephyr for five topping Orange Free States."

"Well?" said Tom.

"Well, where does Brash get those stamps from? Tell us that. How does he get them? That's what we want to know."

"Anyhow, he's not dependent on the Drawford. He can't be," Tom reiterated.

"Hope not, for his own sake. But Eggs and I have no use for Mister Cyril Brash. Not a single ha'porth!"

With which oracular conclusion the brothers took themselves away.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT CAME OF TAKING A SHORT CUT

I THINK it was our friend Horatius Flaccus who wrote of *mens sana* and the rest of it, that dear old quotation which so bravely serves our deans and dignitaries on speech days. How they gurgle, the arch old boys in their gaiters and their aprons, as they roll the fine phrase out; with a twinkle to suggest what dogs they were at our age! Oh yes, they could tell us a tale or two of *their* schooldays—if they liked. Butter melted in their mouths, I warrant, every whit as fast as it melts in ours to-day, and their *corpus sanum* never went neglected. Not a bit of it!

But daylight is desirable for the cultivation of the *corpus sanum*; for which reason it is that at Claybury you are cabined to no more work in class after third lesson is ended at half past twelve, till fourth lesson begins at four o'clock. In the excellent respite thus provided do the sports practisers of the Easter term practise most mightily. On the meadow of Small Side you will observe Tubbins

minor breaking every record, as he fancies. You will mark Smith major leaping immeasurable heights, without the bar. You will watch Brown, Jones, and Robinson—the slowest trio who ever sped from scratch—flogging round lap after lap, quite sanguine that “wind” will carry them to victory. And you will hear tell of performances which are good for every cup, if only they could be repeated on the day.

Then, too, on other afternoons you will see every house disgorge its inmates for the run: the seniors on that long trail round “Waterloo” and Bustard’s Ferry: the juniors downhill through the Happy Woods, up Pink’s Farm, and home across the viaduct. You will watch them stream away, so very white and clean; and mark the honest mud and health they wear when they drag home again.

But the day of days for this is the fourth Saturday in term; that afternoon devoted to all below the Upper School, for a gallant run which never a slackster dare avoid.

Tom’s eyes were glowing as he and Derry changed into their shorts that day. He had told Derry of his confab with the Buttericks; there was no need to tell his chum how much happier it had left him. And this afternoon they intended to enjoy themselves.

Butter and Eggs, joining them as they

trotted off to the start, were volubly of a different opinion.

"Runs are rot!" growled Butter. "Next time we shall have a weak heart!"

Derry regarded him in wonder.

"We shall, Derry. We're sick of them."

If Derry had known the other longer he would have known too, that never a new term but the Buttericks would threaten to develop that infallible exemptive passing as a "weak heart" in the currency of the junior school. But Derry came soon to learn that the bark of the lanky pair was much worse than their bite; that runs were a source of their perennial delight. Because runs gave them the grumble that they loved. So they would shamble their long legs along, growling all the way, and enjoying themselves hugely.

But now the field was off.

"It's all so futile,"--Butter was jerking into his stride on Derry's left—"jogging off to nowhere, and coming back again! Just getting yourselves filthy!"

On the far side came a sympathetic grunt from Butterick minor.

"Quick!" cried Derry, quickening the pace.

"Beastly waste . . . of time . . ." Butter's words began to come in puffs . . . "when a man . . . might be swotting up . . . new . . . issues!"

The field was breaking up. Tom and Derry were steaming on ahead, in the wake of Flambeau Jukes and other veterans who knew the easiest going.

Across the plough the bare trees of the Happy Woods were beckoning, and the murky, brittle undergrowth was waiting to spear the leaders' legs. (This is where you spurt on silently, and where your second wind should find you.)

Plunged into the wood, head high, with very few in front of him, Tom felt that he was going well for the honour of the House of Eagle. To Derry a disaster had befallen, for a boot, splitting right across the face, had dropped him behind, where he attempted to repair the damage with his handkerchief.

Some fifty yards ahead of him, Tom was astonished to see the crimson oriflamme of Jukes disappear sharply, off to the right; but when he had reached the gaunt birch, which marked the spot, he turned promptly in Jukes' tracks. For here was a bridle path, and it must be the short cut that led down to the stream, where they breasted the hill for Pink's.

He was out of the ruck now; Jukes had spurted well away; and Tom was crunching steadily over the wet leaves of the narrow path when a shout behind him hailed him urgently.



A SHOUT BEHIND HAILED HIM.

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE
SRINAGAR
LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

He turned ; and saw Pringle coming down the track. And Pringle's appearance was unwelcome.

So Tom was about to press on the faster, disregarding the call—how often did Pringle condescend to speak to him ?—when a new thought took him. Now was the opportunity, now that they two were alone, to have it out ! Thanks to Butter, he saw that there was something to be said for Pringle after all. Then why couldn't they make their quarrel up ? Tom was happy that day, and at enmity with no man. He wanted to be friends. And probably Pringle was quite a decent chap all the time, only he hadn't understood him.

Tom stopped, waiting for the other to come up. "Isn't it ripping !" he began, with a move as if to trot along in company.

Pringle drew an arm across his sloping brow. "Not so fast !" he gasped. "You wait for your betters !"

There was something in his voice which brought Tom squarely to his purpose.

"I say, Pringle," he continued, without any show of temper, "I never have a chance of talking to you at school. I want to talk to you."

"What about ?"

"I want to have it out."

"Have what out ?"

"Oh, everything. That yarn about the sergeant, for instance."

"What's that to me?"

"Well that's what I want to know. I believe you hatched it up. And you know jolly well it's all a lie, Pringle."

They were standing in the middle of the path, and they had the short cut to themselves. Tom braced himself up at the last word, prepared to dodge a blow.

But Pringle had put both hands in his pockets, straddling his legs.

"It's not a lie," he answered.

"It is a lie, Pringle. Crump's no relation of mine. But anyhow, can't you chuck setting the men on to rag me? I'm sorry if ever I upset you. I can't say more."

Tom felt a little abject here. But he was trying his best to turn away his enemy's bitterness.

"You dirt!" Pringle hissed the word at him. "*You* upset *me*! You get back to your shop!"

"Easy!" said Tom, in a steady undertone. "And that's another thing, Pringle. How do you know what my mother does? And what business is it of yours? Why did you scrawl that beastly picture on my letter?"

For on the previous Sunday afternoon while

Tom was writing to his mother he had been called away to fag, and returned to find his letter inside his blotter as he left it, but disfigured with an ugly drawing of a woman and a shop. He had torn the letter up without a word. But he guessed that Pringle was the artist.

The other leered; his small eyes flashed amusement; he rejoiced that his trouble had not been wasted.

"Blow your letters!" he cried. "And keep your questions to yourself. One day I'll tell . . ."

But Tom did not wait for him to finish.

"I won't stand it!" he flared. Alas! for his pious resolution! "You'll keep your tongue off my mother, Pringle!"

Pringle, stooping with his hands upon his thighs, burst into a guffaw of delight.

"Step in! Step in!" he yelled. "Genuine Reductions during sale! All goods marked at plain figures! If you don't see what you want in the window, please ask for it! This style, three and . . ."

The youngster sprang at him. Pringle caught him by the neck; and at that moment round the turn of the path came a little knot of stragglers, who were jogging on their way without enthusiasm. Among them were the

two Buttericks, grumbling placidly ; and Preston (who had been endeavouring all the week to coax a three-cornered Cape of Good Hope out of Eggs, and cultivated every opportunity), with Derry, making poor progress on his flapping boot, and a sprinkling from the divers houses.

“Halloa !” cried somebody. “What’s up ?”

And then Tom remembered. Since last term Pringle had known his mother’s secret, but for some reason or other had kept it to himself. Now it was bound to come out ! How he wished that he had let Pringle go his way !

His captor looked up, raging.

“I’ll tell you what’s up,” he roared. “I’m going to give this little worm the thrashing of his life ! That’s up !”

“What for ?” cried Derry, pushing to the front.

The answer surprised Tom, and puzzled him.

“Because,”—Pringle was speaking with deliberation now—“because he threw that inkpot at me. I promised him a thrashing then, and now I’m going to keep my word. I’ll teach him to hurl inkpots !”

Tom, smarting under the other’s gibes, was astonished that Pringle hid the secret of the situation. He felt almost grateful. He could

not be expected to divine that Pringle meant to start by putting himself in the right. And Pringle continued, most judiciously :

“Understand that, Strong. It’s not because you are a Council School beast that I shall lick you”—he jerked a loose sapling from the growth beside him—“but I’m going to whack you because you tried to kill me with that inkpot. That’s why.”

Tom did not grasp that by apologising for the inkpot he might shift the responsibility of the next step upon his enemy. But another of the party—one who knew Pringle and all his ways—saw in a flash how the brain in that ugly head was working.

“Tell him you’re sorry you heaved the beastly inkpot!” whispered Butter in Tom’s ear.

But the other stood his ground.

“I won’t! I hate him!” he gasped, with a swift sense of injuries heaped upon him. And a sense, too, of injustice. This came of trying to make it up!

Next instant the stick fell sharply across his shoulders. “Take that!” hissed Pringle. “And that!”

For what followed Pringle was entirely unprepared.

CHAPTER VIII

MOTHER NATURE'S WAY

WITH a duck of the head, Tom had gripped him by the knees ; and jerking them upwards towards his chest, he suddenly relaxed his hold. Pringle fell heavily, and the stick dropped from his hands. Butter stamped his big foot upon it.

"Lick him properly, if you can !" he cried.
"With your fists, Pringle !"

"He can't !" yelled Derry.

The others clustered round, and Pringle picked himself up with a snarl, spluttering at the mouth. Then he rushed again at Tom.

Big and well built as he was for his fourteen years, Tom stood considerably the shorter of the two, and physical and technical advantages were all with Pringle. But Tom was comparatively cool. His highly-strung temperament had had its play, and now, at the pinch of crisis, nervousness was all behind him. Time and time again he had felt that some day their quarrel was bound to come to this. He expected nothing but defeat, but he was tensely determined to suffer all things rather than

submit to a passive thrashing. Tom had nothing to lose.

His adversary, on the other hand, was not prepared for a pitched battle. Indeed, he was taken entirely by surprise.

Never had it entered that conical head that his prey would have the cheek to hit him back ! To hurl inkpots (from a distance) was one matter : it was very much another to make a stand-up fight. He was rancorous and uneasy,—for men of Upper Middle I did not *fight* with kids of the form below. Yet what else could he do ? Well, it was absolutely necessary to give the brat a thorough drubbing. Pringle had everything to lose.

His idea of boxing was something more than elementary, as the younger speedily discovered. For while Tom was striking blindly out, mouth open, head ducked down, a left-hander took him neatly under the chin, and snapped his teeth upon his lips. He fell back, spitting out the blood.

“Good old Pring !” screamed some one—very likely Preston—“good old Pring ! Teach him !”

But Butterick major and Derry sprang between the two.

“Look here, you chaps,” cried Butter, appealing eagerly to all, “if they’re going to

fight, I vote they fight properly. With rounds! Two minute rounds, as near as we can reckon them!"

"Good!" beamed Duncan of the School House. "And we'll move down to the stream, where there's more room. Somebody must keep *cave*!"

But there was no fear of interruption. The party, when it came upon the two, had been straggling in the rear, and now the run had left them all behind. Never was a better opportunity for the business. (And a real square fight, friend moralist, is something we meet rarely in these degenerate days. We grow too delicate, I think, to settle our differences in the manner which Mother Nature planned for us. Yet bad blood sorely needs such honest letting.)

So they pressed down the narrow bridle-path till it opened on the stream, and there Duncan took charge of the proceedings. "I'm not Eagle's House," he said. "So I'll be time-keeper."

From the onset, Pringle, encouraged by the success of his left-hander, set the pace. He danced forward, pranced back, dashed in again and repeated the blow. But this time Tom dodged it; it brushed his cheek, while his own hand fell with a thump upon the

conical head. With a swing from Pringle's right, however, he was less fortunate; his ears rang under the shock.

Another on the forehead sent him ducking once more, and made him an easy target for the other's active fists. Hands upraised he staggered under them, and wondered if the round would ever end. But it did—and he survived it!

"Keep your head up, kid!" bade Butter; and "watch his eye!" added Eggs, when Tom had come swaying back to them.

Then followed two rounds very like the first, during which Tom whirled his arms round wildly, doing very little damage and receiving a good deal of punishment. But he was hard, and bore it without much harm.

In the fourth round Pringle landed cleanly on his eye.

In the fifth the eye began to swell.

In the sixth it had almost closed.

None of the onlookers remembered a fight so unequal and yet so protracted. Previous encounters had rarely lasted beyond a scuffle and a handshake, or a hasty scattering before some prefect's boot. But this was the genuine thing. And the big second-termer, who showed little notion of defence and none whatever of attack, came up gamely every time.

“Finish him, Pring!” screamed Preston.
“Knock him out, can’t you!”

Now Tom had no mind to be finished, if he could avoid it. So he staggered, and panted, and groaned, and swished his long arms through the air—and was battered—till in the eighth round his fist came into very violent contact with his enemy’s mouth. Fair on the protruding teeth it fell, and the blood spurted from lips and knuckles alike. Then Tom ducked swiftly, and repeated his trick with Pringle’s knees.

But this time, as the other landed on his back, there were cries of “Shame!” and “Foul!” Derry, dragging his chum away, chid him, to his absolute astonishment.

“I say, you must fight fair, you know,” he insisted. “You’re not wrestling!”

“Fair!” spluttered Tom, his knuckles to his mouth. “What isn’t fair?”

Who can blame him? He had no acquaintance of the etiquette of the Ring, and no experience of any but the primitive combats of Pound Road, waged without canon or restriction. (In Pound Road, a fight is just a fight: Catch-as-catch-can, All-in, and Best-your-enemy—anyhow!)

“Derry, what’s unfair?” he repeated.

So Derry explained to him. And when he

had heard him through, Tom went up to Pringle, where he scrambled to his feet.

"I'm sorry, Pringle," he stammered. "I didn't know."

If looks could kill, the battle would have ended on the instant. Mad with rage, Pringle glared at the other a moment, then kicked out viciously at his body. But Duncan, thrusting forward, caught his foot and dragged him back.

"Stow it, you cur!" he cried. "He's said he's sorry. Fight fair!"

Old fighters will tell you that some men are never so easy to knock out as at the very onset, adding that this particularly applies to those of a nervous or imaginative disposition. They explain that as familiarity breeds contempt and as the imagined is worse always than the actual, so the first shock, if sustained and overcome, serves to deaden the nerves of such fighters, and to make them more dangerous.

And Tom was just beginning to realise that he had a chance. He might win after all. With this new hope he remembered Butter's counsel: he kept his head well up, and his eye upon the narrow eyes against him.

The fall and the jar of his loosened tooth had shaken Pringle badly; he was left with little reserve to call upon. Unlike Tom, he had no football ardour to thank for stamina.

It flashed across him that he could not see the struggle through much longer ; he felt that he must close Tom's other eye, or throw up the sponge. The idea obsessed him.

Twice they came to grips. Twice they broke away. Pringle pressed. Tom, breathing fast, dodged and retreated and defended himself as best he could. The turf was churned to mud beneath them.

"Three to one on Pring!" shouted some one, whose instincts might be mis-termed "sporting."

But nobody responded.

Sympathy was veering round from Pringle to his smaller adversary who made such a plucky fight. At the beginning the men of the other Houses had been inclined to encourage the older boy, knowing nothing of the true case of the quarrel, but with the hazy idea that this newcomer, only in his second term, was a bumptious youngster who wanted taking down. They called to mind a queer tale which had gone round about him ; that he wasn't quite desirable or something. But presently, as they found the Buttericks "sticking up" for him, they leaned to another view. Everybody knew that old Butter was a "jolly useful chap for stamps" and "quite a decent sort." There was a good deal, too, that ap-

pealed to them in the way that the youngster had told Pringle he was sorry. He'd done the proper thing. They were thinking there couldn't be so much the matter with him after all.

And now Tom's chin began to throb with a sharp, insistent pain where the other's fist had found him at the onset. Presently it found him there again. His teeth rattled. His legs gave way beneath him.

"Pringle! Pringle!" shrilled Preston. "The bounder's done!"—then winced as Duncan cuffed him off. He wondered why?

But Tom was not done. He staggered up with an inarticulate cry, while Derry, as he helped him to his corner, glanced shrewdly at Pringle, panting in his place.

"Old man! stick it out!" he whispered. "He's had about enough!"

On they rushed, and as Pringle lashed at his face, Tom steadied himself and struck him in the ribs. The blow went home.

A gasp that ended in a sigh broke from the thin lips. Pringle's guard dropped.

"Now!" shrieked Derry. "Now, Strong!"

Tom saw the lowered elbow, saw the lean body twitching for its breath, and seeing nothing else but red, he leaped in and dashed his fist, with every ounce of strength left in

him, on the high cheek bones and the leering face. Again and again Pringle's boot stabbed at his shin, till he reeled back, sick with the pain of it.

His head was singing: in his ears drummed the riot of roaring water:—he wondered why Pringle did not spring on him in turn.

Then he became conscious of a sudden babel. An arm was about him; Derry's voice was bidding him "buck up!"

He raised himself and looked round him.

His enemy was lying flat upon his face, his head upon his arms, while the others crowded round in various attitudes of fright and helplessness. One called for water, another ran to the stream and scooped it up. But their ministrations had no effect upon the stricken Pringle.

"Let me alone!" he groaned. "I'm hurt!"

"Where?" asked Butter, kneeling to turn him gently on his back.

"Inside—somewhere—Oh!"

Now this should have frightened Butter as much as it did the others, but his behaviour was most heartless. For he looked up at the company—and winked.

Then he jumped to his feet. "By Jingo!" he cried, "I'm off! We shall be late for call-over!"

A very timely reminder, but a big drop, surely, from the fine frenzy of a combat not inglorious to the petty commonplace of call-over! Yet it is just at the call of the commonplace that our most heroic flights come tumbling down to earth; which is life's playful little way of reminding us what mannikins we are.

At any rate, the effect of Butter's words was instantaneous. There was nothing much the matter with Pringle (boys of his age can't hurt one another badly in a good straight bout of fisticuffs) but he had been minded to lie there in a highly tragic pose. Smarting with humiliation, only by this pretence of serious injury could he carry his abasement off. As an object of grave concern he might escape derision, and hide his pride in refuge.

But at the cry of call-over pride yielded to expediency, and Pringle was up and away well before Derry had finished bathing his friend's eye in the stream. Then the two sprinted to overtake the others, and all in too much haste for words went puffing back to Claybury.

At last they had the school in sight again, and creeping cautiously by devious ways they gained the shelter of Small Side. Thence, under cover of the houses, they scouted in open order to the quad.

But the quad stood in ominous desertion, and one glance at the doors of Big School revealed that they were closed, and revealed, too, the grim figure of the sergeant standing on sentry-go without. His key dangled from his wrist.

Then Duncan showed the makings of a strategist. Some were for going forward, and risking it.

"No," he bade them, "it's no good asking Crump to let us in. They'd spot Strong and Pringle if we did. Why, look at them!"

Certainly nobody regarding the pair for a moment could have had any doubt of the manner in which they had been enjoying themselves.

"Scatter and scoot," continued Duncan, "and change before the chaps come out! Some one bag some raw meat for Strong's eye! And I say, each of us must make his own excuse!"

"And keep mum about the fighting!" added Stephenson, of Dale's.

"Of course, goat!" retorted Duncan. So they went their separate ways.

For Duncan himself, as it transpired, this suggestion panned out very nicely. When in due course he was hauled, he found the captain of the School House in lenient mood,

and not by any means inquisitive. The culprit had missed call-over; no amount of explanation would undo that fact. But he remembered, good creature, that this had been "the kids' " day, and it was only natural that kids should lose themselves occasionally. So Duncan came off lightly.

How it fared with Stephenson and with the few of the other Houses, history leaves untold.

But the men of Eagle's were less fortunate. Wynne was no tyrant, and they might very well have escaped lightly also—in view of the occasion—had Pringle been sufficiently himself to keep his wits about him. For Pringle would undoubtedly have remembered to kick wisdom into Preston. The precaution went overlooked.

And it happened after fifth lesson that Preston was the first of the defaulters to be hauled by Wynne, and in fear and trembling he quaked into the presence.

Was it only terror, or did he think to divert the storm from his own head by the excitement of his news? In any case, this followed:

"Please, Wynne," Preston blurted out at once, when he should have waited for the question, "please, Wynne, it wasn't my fault! Really, Wynne!"

Wynne regarded him coldly.

"Why?" he asked.

"Please, Wynne, Strong was fighting!"

Wynne regarded him more coldly. And then proceeded to digest the tidings after a fashion which gave their bearer no opportunity to gabble further.

"Bend over, Preston!" he remarked. . . .
And later, "Now send Strong!"

Tom's reception was brief, but rather more diverting. Wynne has always been proud that he managed not to laugh when the youngster arrived to bear marked but silent testimony to the truth of Preston's statement. Tom stood a little sideways, regarding the captain gravely with his one sound eye.

"You must never be late for call-over, Strong! Do you hear?"

"Yes, Wynne."

"Look me full in the face, Strong!"

Tom turned, trying to appear unconscious.

"Humph! Runs are meant for running, Strong!"

"Yes, Wynne!"

"Do you know what they mean by circumstantial evidence, Strong?"

"I think so, Wynne. But I'm not certain."

Wynne bobbed round hastily, in time to

hide his amusement. He was very busy with his mantelpiece before he could resume.

"You must never fight on runs, Strong!"

"No, Wynne."

"You mustn't fight at any time, Strong!"

"No, Wynne."

"Bend over, Strong!"

Derry and the two Buttericks followed in their turn, and came grinning back to an expectant audience a little sore, but not at all dejected. Last of all went Pringle.

But Pringle proved a disappointment to the class-room. The bell had begun to ring for Chapel when he emerged, and made it clear that he had nothing to report upon the course of the proceedings. To a timid murmur from Preston of "Beastly hard lines, I call it," Pringle replied in a manner mute but savage. In parenthesis, I fancy Preston deserved it.

A few bruises, one cut cheek, two barked shins, one broken tooth, and one blue-black-purple eye completed the casualties of that memorable combat. A little bad blood, too, had been left upon the field. For his part, Tom was hoping that this bad blood had been left behind for ever; and so much he confided to Derry the next morning.

"Pringle's certain to make it up now, isn't he?" he added.

"Perhaps!" replied his oracle.

"Anyhow, it can't get to old Eagle's ears; can it?"

"Not much!" had answered Derry.

Yet Patrick Terence Derry proved a little premature. Many more matters came to the Old Bird's ears than ever his House supposed. And even as the words fell from Derry's lips, an excited youth came dancing up to them.

"I say, Strong!" he cried. "Do you know where Pringle is?"

"No?" said Tom.

"Well, I do. He's in Eagle's study!"

Tom gasped, with a sudden feeling of disaster.

"And the Old Bird wants you too," added the delighted messenger. "He told me to send you up to him at once! You're in for it!"

CHAPTER IX

A FEW REMARKS FROM MR. EAGLE

"Now, how did it begin?" asked Mr. Eagle.

"Please, sir; Strong threw an inkpot at me," answered Pringle.

"What? In the wood?"

"No, sir. One day last term."

The House Master regarded the two gravely.

"And why did you throw an inkpot at Pringle, Strong?"

His tone was one of rebuke rather than of interrogation. He did not need to be informed that new boys do not throw heavy inkpots at their elders by way of pastime, but require some provocation to the act. Moreover, it may be repeated that more things came to the Old Bird's ears than ever passed his lips.

Tom, dropping his head, and to all appearance deeply interested in the pattern of the carpet, felt the hawk-eye searching him.

"Well, I understand that you have both been punished by Wynne, so to that extent the incident is ended."

The culprits looked up with a quick relief, but the next words dashed their happiness :

“ Strong, go outside and wait in the passage. Pringle, you stay ! ”

Alone with Pringle, Mr. Eagle rose and crossed to the fireplace, where he stood in grim calm, his hands behind him, his head pushed a little forward, gazing at the culprit. Pringle had seen the Old Bird in this pose on one previous occasion, and the recollection was painful. He was doing his best to retain an air of injured innocence, but as the cold silence continued, it became more and more impossible. At last the master spoke :

“ Well, Pringle ? ” he said, quietly.

Pringle found nothing to reply.

“ I am waiting for your explanation, Pringle ? ”

“ Please, sir, I’ve told you, sir ! Strong threw an inkpot at me ! ”

With a little gesture of impatience, the “ Old Bird ” brushed this plea aside. “ I am waiting for your explanation, Pringle, ” he repeated.

The boy began to mumble something about the danger of inkpots as a missile. And at that moment the bland expression of the other’s face was altered. The hawk-eye flashed contempt.

“ We have finished with inkpots, Pringle. You must credit me, please, with some measure

of intelligence. I have eyes, Pringle ; *and ears.*"

Pringle began to stammer miserably. "Please, sir, that's all," he muttered.

"Then I am sorry you think so,"—the master's head jerked out a little further—"I was hoping to hear you admit that you were thoroughly ashamed of yourself. Your behaviour towards Strong has been disgusting, consistently disgusting, Pringle. It is painful to reflect that any boy in my House has such very small ideas, and so little self-respect, and no better appreciation of what he owes to Claybury. I should like you to understand that there is nothing in Strong's record before he came here to justify your behaviour. When he came to Claybury you should, being a gentleman, have regarded him only as a new boy—as a Claybury boy—and in no other light. Who are you, to presume to judge ? To visit the . . . er . . . misfortune of his circumstances upon the lad ? You, Pringle ; an ignorant child of fifteen !"

Mr. Eagle had wound himself up to a pitch of fine scorn ; but now his voice dropped to something kindlier.

"I have not discussed this matter with you before, Pringle, because I hoped that things would right themselves without my inter-

vention. I am going to finish with it this morning, and I trust that you will never compel me to return to it, for your own sake. Consider it properly. Strong has never once complained of you; surely that speaks something for him? Remember he came here handicapped; and that would have been a point in his favour, Pringle, if you had been a little older. You would have given him a chance. Older heads than yours considered, and determined, the question of his joining us; and I want you to see—I think you will—that you were doing a very wicked thing when you resolved to torment him, to keep him back, to make his life miserable. Can't you see it, Pringle? You were . . . stealing . . . his chance from him. I am sure that never occurred to you?"

The Old Bird paused, and it is admitted that his harangue had both astonished and disturbed its audience. Pringle stammered something about "never thinking of it that way!"

"No, I was sure you had not. Boys are naturally . . . er . . . cruel, Pringle; or, shall we say, inconsiderate. But listen! . . ."

His voice was almost gentle now.

"When I was a boy of your age, Pringle, we had no tuck-shop at our school. We bought our tuck from an old man and his

wife, who lived in a cottage near by and kept it as a little shop expressly for us. They were very badly off; they barely made a living at it; and they were very infirm. So we were permitted more or less to help ourselves; they trusted us, you see. Well, now and then when the tiny place was crowded we . . . er . . . may have taken a little more than we paid for."

Mr. Eagle moved from the fireplace, and laid a hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"Do you know why I've told you that, Pringle? We did not mean to steal—we were only very young. But from that day to this some of us have never forgiven ourselves. That's why I have told you. Now go—and think it out. Oh, and tell Strong to come back in five minutes' time."

As Pringle was departing, another view occurred to the Old Bird. He deemed it illuminative, and hastened to put it:

"One moment, Pringle. Another light. When a soldier has been promoted from the ranks, his fellow-officers do their best to help him along. Suppose we consider that Strong has been promoted from the ranks? Eh?"

I do not know which of the two had been enjoying himself the least. But as soon as Pringle had gone, Mr. Eagle sighed and shot

a hungry glance at the pipe upon his table. He moved to take it up, but checked himself, returning to his fireplace. His thoughts appeared to trouble him.

Of one side of his character the House Master was constantly afraid. A man of very strong personal likes and dislikes, he was so sensitive of this tendency that he kept himself under a rigorous discipline ; apprehensive always lest his feelings should master his judgment. Under pressure, this honest anxiety became very nearly a mental warp ; he mistook any kindlier impulse for emotion, and his conscience had only to whisper a suggestion of favouritism to drive him in the opposite direction. His sense of justice was too complex.

He disliked Pringle, and accordingly had forced himself to handle him more gently. He liked Strong ; he was taken with his keen, blue eyes, with his eager bearing—and therefore he was schooling himself to suppress the feeling, and when the youngster stood before him, he spoke more harshly than he felt. (But how could Tom know that ?)

“I have very little to say to you, Strong. You must not be quarrelsome, and you must try to get on with everybody. A feud is bad for the House, and I can’t allow it. It takes

two, you know, to make a quarrel. Of the two, no doubt you have been the less to blame . . ."

("Steady!" whispered conscience. "'Ware favouritism!")

"But what I must tell you is this. In a sense you are at Claybury only on probation. Although you do not know it, the conditions under which your scholarship is held explicitly provide that unless you behave yourself . . . you will go."

Mr. Eagle paused. Tom waited, wondering what was coming next.

"The Bonnithorne scholarship, Strong, may be revoked immediately—note that—if its holder displays any 'moral disability,' to quote the language of the deed. Whether or no such moral disability exists remains to be determined by his House Master alone. In fact, at the end of the holder's first year his House Master is required to report on this point to the Bonnithorne trustees. I shall be obliged—obliged, mark you!—to furnish that report, and the trustees will be equally obliged to act upon it. Do you understand me?"

There was a tremble in Tom's voice. "I think so, sir," he gulped.

"I hope you do, Strong. It was left to my discretion either to warn you of this condition,

or not. I have been in some doubt which course to adopt; perhaps I do wrong to tell you; but in the face of this little affair with Pringle I am trying to exercise my discretion in your favour, as I believe. However, remember this. If I am—as I hope I may not be—dissatisfied with your general conduct when I report next July, and I must report honestly, your scholarship will certainly be withdrawn. That's all."

In his scrupulous anxiety to do justice all round, Mr. Eagle had elaborated his point sufficiently for the meanest intelligence. But he left it as a threat and a shadow, rather than as a stimulus.

Speaking lightly, with an air of dismissing all that had gone before, the Old Bird turned to the letter on his desk:

"One minute, Strong. I fancy I've something here belonging to you. But they've made a bit of a mess of the address!"

He passed the boy a letter in a soiled and crumpled envelope, directed with a clumsy sprawl. At the sight of the smudges and the "mess" which his correspondent had certainly "made of the address," Tom blushed, in his nervous fashion, and fumbled it away hastily. His embarrassment surprised the master; it

seemed that the boy took it guiltily, anxious to conceal it.

For the rest of that Sunday, Tom Strong was a very unhappy individual. The news of the condition under which he held his scholarship had taken him by surprise, and hearing it in this fashion, very naturally he made more of it than he need have done. Not old enough to appreciate that "moral disability" was just one of those quaint phrases which lawyers delight to employ (what a pretty term to wrangle over if it came to be interpreted in Court! What a chance for tome, and casuist, and the subtle splitting of hairs!), the expression roundly frightened him, as it might have frightened any healthy youngster of fourteen. How much it meant exactly he couldn't puzzle out, but already, he fretted, he had put himself in its clutches by standing up to Pringle. Otherwise the Old Bird would never have rubbed it in so!

But on the heels of sorrow came delight. For on Monday the birds sang, the sun shone, —and Tom was posted for another trial in The Thirty.

CHAPTER X

A PROMISE AND A PROBLEM

WHEN Tom found his name up for The Thirty he ran straight away to tell Derry. But for once Derry's face fell at the tidings.

"Oh, bother!" he grunted, "I am sorry."

Tom was puzzled. "Why?" he said, a little sore. "It's ripping. I do wish Wednesday would come!"

"Well, I wanted you awfully on Wednesday afternoon," insisted Derry, after a moment's hesitation. "I was going to ask you to get leave-off, and come with me to Market Twyford."

"But I can't shuffle footer, Derry. I mayn't get another chance this term, if I do!"

"Can't you say you've hurt yourself? You were knocked about a bit on Saturday, you know! Or something?"

"Yes, but Derry . . ."

"All right!" the other interrupted. "I know it's beastly selfish of me. But I did want you to come. Awfully!"

"Won't some one else do?"

"No!" murmured Derry.

Claybury has not yet succumbed to the meretricious charms of hockey in the place of Rugger in the Easter term, and therein lies the secret of that consistent standard of excellence at the finest winter game which the school maintains, to the astonishment of the critics and the envy of its rivals. Claybury is content to excel at Rugby football, and it knows that those who play one game for three months and another for the next three, dividing their allegiance, are not likely to shine very steadily at either. So it devotes the Easter term, the latter half of one season, to building against the months before Christmas in the ensuing season, when the principal matches are decided. For colours have gone down, and their places must be filled. In January, then, the football has lost something of its keenest interest—this culminates in December with *the* match against Castleburgh—because, just as no blues are given at Oxford or Cambridge after the Varsity match, so neither School nor House cap can be won at Claybury during the Easter term. But a few matches remain to play, and these afford an opportunity of trying men who were in the running for their places the term before.

Another game with The Thirty had been the summit of Tom's ambition and he was

looking forward to it eagerly. With a stab of disappointment he remembered that Derry had done more than this for him; and here, though it had not, of course, occurred to Derry in that light, was the first appeal to his gratitude. No wonder he was hesitating.

"Well," he said at last, a little slowly, "I'll try to work it, Derry. Yes, I'd just as soon go with you."

But Coxon, skippering Eagle's now, was much annoyed when he heard the keenest youngster in his House pressing for leave-off, and Wynne might have refused it, but he remembered that a little indulgence might fall gracefully after the swishing of a day or two before.

But when the two were off and on the long road to the town, Derry had no particular reason to give for the expedition. He remarked vaguely that he had "one or two things to buy," and that "it wasn't half bad" in Market Twyford, while his companion thought ruefully of the game he had left behind him.

The town lay in its normal state of sleepy peace, and entering the High Street, Derry pulled up before most of the shop windows, to set Tom wondering whether he had been dragged there to gaze through glass at the

wares of jewellers, corn merchants, and the makers of agricultural instruments. At the chemist's, Derry made a perfunctory purchase of tooth-powder, till presently, cutting through the market place to the shabbier part of the town, it seemed to Tom that his friend was growing uneasy.

"Where next?" he would ask at each new turn, whereat the other would answer something about a "look round."

When the clock over the Town Hall struck three, and they had been parading in this fashion for a full half-hour (ample time for enjoying Market Twyford!) Derry struck off more briskly, and soon they reached that corner by the Goat-in-Knickerbockers, where the big red post-box stands, and, almost abruptly, the fields begin again. There Derry stopped.

"I say, Strong," he said, a little shyly, "wait for me at the corner here a jiffy, by the pillar-box. I won't be long."

"Why, what's up?" cried Tom.

"Nothing. I've just . . . a call to make. You wait here!"

And he bolted, with an appeal from his astonished companion to remember the time, and call-over.

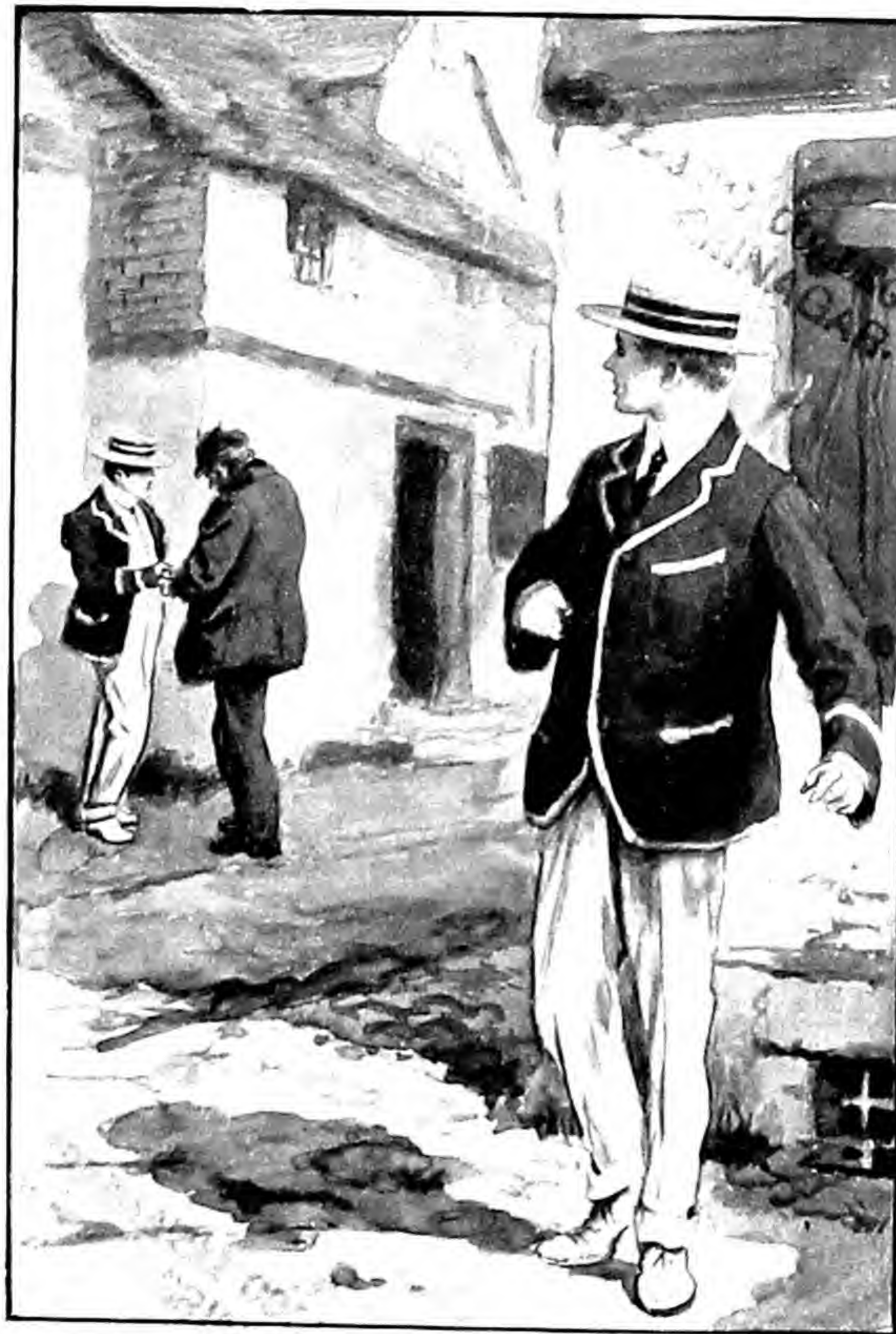
Trying to look as if he was not waiting—as most of us do in like circumstance—Tom began

to saunter, with an eye always on the pillar-box. He had no watch; the clock over the Town Hall was invisible from his corner, and as the minutes passed and brought no Derry back, he became troubled and uneasy. To miss call-over again, after the Old Bird's warning, would be disaster. More and more he wondered why Derry had brought him here?

So up and down he paced, in a narrowing radius from his post, and always when he reached it he gazed anxiously in the direction Derry had taken. He had run off to the right, and up the third or fourth turning—but was he never coming back? And when Tom felt sure that he had been gone for a good thirty minutes, he began to fear that something must have happened. Ought he to go and see?

Bewildered and fretting lest they might be late, at last he could restrain himself no longer. He started off to hunt for the absentee. The first turning proved to be a cul-de-sac; the next a small drab street of workmen's cottages, habited only, to all visible appearance, by a lean cat and a few babies on a doorstep. The third was deserted also, save for two figures in conversation at the top. Tom stood stock-still at the sight.

Thirty yards away, with his shoulders hunched up and his back turned to the



SOMETHING PASSED QUICKLY FROM THE BOY'S HAND TO THE MAN'S.

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE
SRINAGAR
LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

Castane

14

10

corner where Tom stood, a rough in the shabbiest of clothes was talking earnestly to no one else but Derry. They seemed to be in the act of parting; something passed quickly from the boy's hand to the man's; the latter nodded his head with emphasis.

And as soon as Tom saw this, a guilty feeling of eavesdropping sent him fleeing to his pillar-box. Derry would be with him in a minute; he had seen that; and as he ran he made up his mind to say nothing till Derry had spoken first. It looked too much like spying! Besides, his friend was sure to tell him all about it; he always did. And then he could confess what he had seen.

So when the truant came sauntering back a moment later, he was met merely with an inquiry for the time, and a reminder of call-over. Mechanically Derry's hand went up to his watch-pocket. But he dropped it again immediately.

"Oh, there's heaps of time, Strong," he replied uneasily, buttoning his coat across his breast, "I wasn't twenty minutes." Tom remarked only that they had seemed like sixty.

All the way home Derry chattered on, but never a word of what he had been up to. He talked as if the two had been together all the time, and this puzzled his companion. It

was unlike the impulsive Derry to hide anything. Tom had quite expected him to chatter everything out at once, for that was Derry's way; but instead he fancied he was talking for the mere sake of preventing any questions. So Tom felt a little hurt; sore to be shut out of his friend's confidence.

In good time they were passing "Father Wraight's," when Derry confessed a tremendous thirst, and they entered, to behold the sly eyes of Preston regarding them above the rim of a large tumbler of ginger-beer. And when he had satisfied himself that only the froth remained, Preston, glass in hand, eyed the pair the more significantly still. He wagged his head at them.

"Hello, my beauties!" sidling up with an air of mystery, "been having a good time?"

"Let's hook it," whispered Derry, making to withdraw.

"What?" cried Preston. "Going without your drink? Ta, ta! But, I say; half a shake!"

The two turned. "Well?" said Tom.

"Oh, nothing," laughed Preston. "Another ginger-beer, please, Wraight! It's dry work exploring Market Twyford!"

A spell of silence followed until they were entering the avenue, where Derry stopped.

"Look here, old man," he began, with a return of his former nervousness, "you must think me rummy?"

"No, I don't." But this was a trifle dubiously.

"You're wondering why I lugged you out. Now, aren't you?"

"Oh, that's all right, Derry."

"Well, I sort of felt I wanted you, Strong. I was forced to . . . cut away like that, you know, and leave you. But it would have been horrid if you hadn't been hanging about handy."

It was on Tom's lips to tell his friend what he had seen; but Derry was pretty close, he thought, and, feeling sore, he hesitated. The next moment he was not sure whether to be glad or sorry for it.

"I can't tell you why I went away, old man," Derry was continuing. "Never. I couldn't tell anybody; not even the pater. But it wasn't for anything low down."

Tom thought of the shabby stranger, and said nothing.

"And I want you to do something for me, Strong. Will you?"

Tom wondered what was coming.

Earnestly, insistently, bending forward until his face almost touched his friend's, and with

a manner that sat strangely on his frank features, Derry pursued his object:

"Strong, don't tell any of the other fellows I left you."

"Why should I?" laughed Tom.

"Of course, there's no chance of the thing ever cropping up, and you're never likely to be asked, Strong. But I want you to promise, faithfully, that you'll always keep it dark, always. Whatever happens. You'll never let out anything?"

His friend was almost pleading now, and Tom's mind went swiftly at the sight of that anxiety to his own second afternoon at Claybury, and to Derry's note.

He attempted an air of indifference, to conceal his uneasiness.

"You're making an awful fuss of it, old man," he laughed again. "It might be something fearfully serious by the way you go on. Of course I'll never breathe a word about it. Not I!"

"Never?" pressed the other.

"Never, Derry. N-e-v-e-r; *never!*"

"Thanks awfully, Strong!" Derry's face was brightening. "I know you won't. I'd take your word for anything."

Very much that neither could foresee was to befall Tom Strong at Claybury before either

of them discussed again the events of that afternoon. For from that moment the subject dropped dead between them ; Derry and Tom might each have forgotten it completely.

But Tom could not forget it ; he was too much troubled by his own part in the proceedings. In hiding what he had overseen from Derry, he was trying to do the right thing. But it was only after a long spell of pondering, after much doubt and bewilderment, that he made up his mind what the right thing was. A year ago—supposing that it could have happened at Pound Road—he might never even have stopped to think. He would just have declared that he had seen him, rather as a good joke, suggesting that he had “scored.” But since then he had come under a code which seemed to require something different. He was impressed with the gravity of the affair in Derry’s eyes—“I couldn’t tell anybody ; not even the pater”—and delicacy insisted that he had surprised a secret to which he had no right, that he must hide it from Derry and from everybody in the world. You must forget the whole thing, said Honour ; you must act as if you had never left your pillar-box. Supposing, he argued, supposing he and Derry had swopped places ; supposing that he had been

in Derry's shoes and Derry had pried on him unwittingly, how would Derry behave? Why, Derry would never hesitate a moment; it would all be clear to him. "I couldn't help seeing them," he fancied Derry arguing, "by itself that's nothing wrong. But it would be wrong if I remembered what I had seen. So I must just wipe those two minutes out of my existence. I must just *unsee* it all."

Yes, he concluded, that was what Derry would do. So then and there, and apart altogether from the promise he had given, he determined that no body and no thing should ever drag a word of it from him. A fragment of Derry's secret had become his; he would guard it sacredly; and most of all from Derry.

Meanwhile that young man showed few symptoms of bothering himself about it any more. (A mighty black shadow would have been needed to depress the buoyancy of Patrick Terence Derry for any length of time!) Moreover, he had too much to think about in the excitement of the Sports, when eventually his happiness was crowned by a third in the Hurdles under Sixteen. A long letter went to Sir Patrick that same evening, and for thirty-six hours after the arrival of its answer Derry rose in Eagle's class-room to the summit

of regard. Chocolate cadenzas were (very nearly) at a discount, and you never knew a man more popular. If only postal orders could last for ever!

In these days Pringle became very quiet, evincing towards Tom an attitude of masterly inaction. He never interfered with him, and he ceased to betray the slightest interest in his existence. If he had formed any opinion upon the Old Bird's views, he did not pass it on, and the withdrawal of his active animosity reacted speedily upon the other juniors of the House.

For Preston and his like there was little fun remaining in a course of ragging and annoyance which had ceased to attract the support and encouragement of Pringle. So they fell back on aping his example, and left the newcomer alone. It was a bit stale after all, they told each other, to go on ragging the chap, even though he was Crump's nephew and—all the rest of it. Naturally a man couldn't forget that in a hurry, but still, Strong was dull sport. Let him rip.

Of course, a few of these worthies, when they felt quite sure that Pringle was not at hand, would tack, and approach Tom as if they had never baited him *coram populo*. But mostly they found him coldly irresponsible.

There was no vindictiveness in this. Tom was nursing no grudges, but his feelings, though they ran deep, were transparently sincere. One day, when he had been snubbing the advances of Preston (for even Preston, like Homer, nodded) he put these feelings in a nutshell. "I simply can't pretend to like a chap," he said to Derry, "when I don't. And I won't oil up to a fellow who's been beastly!"

"But Preston's doing the oiling!" Derry had replied.

"Well then, old man, I suppose I can't stand oilers."

So Tom went his own way, and perhaps, under the shadow of the Old Bird's warning, he took himself too seriously. He was becoming a somewhat lonely creature, working hard, and careful—over-careful—to avoid the semblance of any mischief. His animal spirits had been subdued—by two words of "lawyers' language."

CHAPTER XI

A TRADITION IN JEOPARDY

It was a tradition in those days at Claybury that Eagle's were never any good at cricket. Accuracy might retort that Eagle's had been once Cock House ; but that was in the Stone Age, and the Honour Board in Hall which testified the fact was weather-worn, and very far from lustrous. Long since had the giants who wrought that marvel of the misty past been scattered to all corners of the globe ; their names only survived in a few faded letters to the eyes of their degenerate successors.

Yet degenerate is scarcely a fair term, since Eagle's had not themselves to blame for this. They were a small House, and other factors worked against them. For some years now Mr. Cushing, enlisted first at Claybury in the rôle of Sports Master, had ruled a House of his own ; and his name, passed into history with Oxford's great victory at Lord's in '95, exercised powerful attraction for newcomers of cricket aspiration. To Cushing's went the pick of New Clays whose fathers had deter-

mined to see them in the School XI—a perennial source of cricketing new blood. To this was owing the record of extraordinary success which the Boards emblazon for Cushing's. True, they had not proved invincible; now and then the School House had managed to secure the Cup; and for two successive seasons, before he stepped straight from the Claybury team into his county side, Clive-Waller, with that left arm of his, bowled Mason's into Cock House against a tide of odds. But H. F. Clive-Wallers are not found twice in a decade.

With May, and the beginning of the cricket season, Eagle's plunged just as bravely into their forlorn quest for the Cup as every year they had done. Everybody turned up at nets, and nobody could see why they should not win one match, or so, "with a little bit of luck." They reminded one another of the "glorious uncertainty" of the game—with emphasis upon the adjective—and after all, as Hammond would reiterate in Commons (consecrate to Colours and to prefects) it is simply impossible, you know, for the same House always to be last. Violent discomfiture fell speedily on any pessimist who would venture to counter that history has a habit of repetition.

Mr. Herbert Lascelles, who reigned in Eagle's under the Old Bird, was something, too, of a "brazen-faced old optimist." He did not profess to be a cricketer, but his enthusiasm was of more value to the House than any mild measure of personal prowess. He would declare airily that it was astonishing to him that eleven of his boys could not hit a ball as hard, as often, and as far as any eleven of Mr. Cushing's. He insisted that it became a mere question of determination, and of considerably less respect for established reputations. He was fond of trotting out this argument; and, unlike many heresies, it was certainly encouraging.

The championship was not decided on the cup-tie plan, but after the style of tournament mis-styled American. And when Cushing's had beaten them by an innings and Mason's had heaped Pelion upon Ossa, Hammond suggested to the outraged Herbert Lascelles that there must be something after all in established reputations. To which the master had retorted that the captain was a slave to precedent. "You're just handcuffed, my dear Hammond," he averred—they were sauntering round the Small Side ground—"just handcuffed by trite formula. You want gumption, Hammond. You're out of date!"

Hammond was nonplussed.

"You've not too many men to choose from, have you?" continued the iconoclast.

"No," said Hammond, "that's exactly where we're hit, sir."

"And you're such a poor creature of tradition that you never dream of looking below the Upper School for them!"

"No, I don't, sir," with a smile of something like amusement.

"No, you don't," and Herbert Lascelles made a great show of indignation. "I'll tell you what you do. Every match it's just a toss-up how you fill your tail. So you throw in a few mediocrities, men like Parrot and Jukes and Matthews, who never *can* be anything but tail. They may scrape a dozen: very likely they won't: but anyhow, there they are. Better than nothing, say you."

"Yes, I do," laughed Hammond, stoutly.

"Well, you're wrong, my friend. Because their presence keeps out somebody else, and among those somebodies you might find a spark of talent. You're commonplace, my friend. Take a risk; it can't be much risk, though, after Jukes and such raffle raffle; and go in for experiments. Find some one, even if he is a kid, who might come off. Most likely, of course, he'd let you down. But you

haven't won a match yet, so what's to lose? Be original, friend Hammond, and look below the Upper School!"

Hammond was grinning broadly now. "Where is he?" he challenged.

Mr. Lascelles had a nice eye for effect; this eye had been searching the meadows while he talked. And now he pointed a dramatic finger at a sturdy little figure approaching in his flannels, tossing a ball up as he went.

"There he is!" he remarked sententially.

"What? Strong?" cried Hammond.

"Yes, Strong! I tell you, Hammond, the lad's got quite a knack for bowling googlies."

"But I've often seen him bowling to the other kids, sir," protested Hammond.

"Yes; just so. He took my wicket three times last Tuesday . . ."

This may have been presumption, but it was, *per se*, no evidence of skill. One fears that it left Hammond unimpressed. But while the other was finishing, he beckoned Tom.

"Here, Strong," he said, "I hear you can bowl googlies?"

Tom grinned embarrassment.

"Well, how do you bowl 'em, Strong?"

"Oh, please, Hammond, I don't know. I

stand behind Bryson when he's on in Big Side, and I watch him."

Bryson *was* a googly bowler, and a good one. In each match played already by Claybury he had taken a few wickets.

"Well, Strong?"

"Mine are mostly flukes, Hammond. Sometimes they break, and sometimes they don't. But I'm getting into the pitch, and I can twist my wrist like Bryson does," Tom concluded cheerfully.

"Then just fetch a bat, and send me down a few at that net."

So Tom shot off in vast delight, which was changed to trepidation as he proceeded to "send down a few" to the big man. "Sometimes they break, and sometimes they don't"—that afternoon it seemed as if they wouldn't. But at last, when Hammond had become a little tired, one did!—broke right round the captain's legs, to a loud guffaw from Herbert Lascelles as the wickets jerked apart. And the next, a good length coming across smartly, upset the off stump.

Hammond left the stumps in disarray. "Do you know how you managed that?" he asked eagerly.

"No, really, Hammond. It just happened," answered the performer.

"Sheer genius!" whispered Mr. Lascelles. "Eccentric genius; probably he'll lose it all. But you try him, Hammond!"

When a day or two later some one tore into the class-room at Eagle's to announce that one of its inmates was up to play against the School House, great was the astonishment and *éclat*. The men in studies, then, were not the only ones who could play cricket, however much they thought so! When it was added that the lucky individual was Strong, everybody began to talk at once, reminding each other, with the stifled insistence of a comic opera chorus, that Strong could bowl a bit at practice. And Brash awoke to a sudden recollection that he had brought the prodigy to Claybury. So Brash assumed an air or two.

Somewhere, writers indicate, there is a seventh heaven of delight; but its locality, if they are any guides, is transitory and indeterminate. Apparently this elysium moves from spot to spot. Certainly on the night before the School House match it was discovered—of all places—in B dormitory at Eagle's, where it was habited by a youth named Thomas Strong. He lingered in it a long time, unable to sleep, his thoughts a whirl of excitement, now repeating word for word

the letter he had written off to Kilburn with the news, now wondering what he would have to tell in sequel. He was certain that if he made a dismal mess of things next day—if he let the House down—his mushroom popularity would wither more quickly than it had arisen.

Some boys are born cricketers; but they are doubly fortunate if their talent is recognised and fed. And thrice happy are the few such whose natural gift is expanded thoughtfully; is neither pressed nor misdirected; the few who are taught the *how* and the *why* of it with a nice regard for individuality. (Who would not be poorer had the genius of one, Gilbert Jessop, been "coached" out of him in boyhood?)

Very shrewdly Herbert Lascelles had concealed from Hammond his real anxiety that Tom should have a trial. Although himself no great performer and posing only as a flip-pant critic, Mr. Lascelles both loved the game and knew it; he had a shrewd eye for anything outside the stereotyped. All the Eagle bowlers were very much alike, purveyors of simple, straight stuff; and Mr. Lascelles had quietly encouraged Tom to persevere in his attempt to model Bryson, recognising that a boy of his age, who had been keen enough to

study a good bowler for himself—to puzzle how he did it—might prove beyond the common. Every boy is keen enough to bat; but few youngsters, as he reflected, will toil spontaneously at the other thing.

But Tom never knew—at the time—that he had in him the makings of a more than useful bowler; he was just conscious that somehow or other he could, every now and then, do more or less what Bryson did. He was unaware that anybody capable of tossing up a decent googly has become an asset of value to better sides than a House XI. This he learned later.

Next day, when the School House had won the toss and their first pair were donning leisurely pads, Herbert Lascelles—outwardly phlegmatic, but inwardly a bubble of excitement—drew Hammond on one side.

“Well?” he said, “who’s starting the bowling?”

“Oh, Dyer and myself, I think, sir, as usual.”

“And Strong?”

“Second change, sir.”

Mr. Lascelles groaned. “I said you had no gumption, my friend,” he whispered. “Go the whole hog, man! Start with Strong! Unloose your freak on ’em before they know

what's coming. Seriously, Hammond, what's the use of playing a man for his bowling, and that googlies, unless you give him every chance?"

"But Trellis and Lawrence will knock him all over the shop, sir!"

"Very likely. Then you can take him off, can't you? It's all a toss up, but hasn't it occurred to you that if he gets a wicket early the rest may funk him? In any case, he's much more likely to come off straight away than if you only try him when they're set. Start with Strong!"

Hammond had never known the other so emphatic. But Eagle's were stirred to noisy amazement when the field went out and they saw their captain toss the ball to Strong. Surely Hammond couldn't be putting the kid on first? Never!

But it looked like it. They watched four men spread out on the leg boundary; they watched short-leg creeping nearer; mid-on was dropping back. "Crumbs!" exclaimed Derry, where the Junior class-room clustered under the elms, "Strong's on first, you men!"

And the School House heroes were as astonished as the spectators. A plump youth waiting in his pads for the fall of the first wicket, gleefully invoked his aunt to witness

Eagle's poverty in bowling. He rejoiced that his own innings came next. He hoped (secretly) that it would come soon.

It was ridiculous.

Trellis, who captained the School House, when he had taken two-leg and surveyed the field, winked at his partner at the other end. Bryson he knew: twice that term already had Bryson clean-bowled him: Bryson he respected. But it was very much like Hammond's impudence to trade on this, and unearth some desolate fag to try the Bryson dodge on him? Well,—and Trellis shifted his grip a little higher up the handle.

"He's got nerve enough!" remarked the plump youth, as they marked the youngster move his men, one nearer, another more round.

"Pretty cool for a babe, eh?"

"Cheek, I call it," answered his companion.

"Trying to copy Bryson!"

A quick duck of the umpire's head, as Trellis swung his bat round. A sharp cry from Hammond. Shrill voices from the shadow of the elms. And the long face of the School House skipper, regarding his off stump.

It was at that moment that the plump youth, snatching up his gloves, remarked uneasily that he never could stand googlies. There was too much beastly luck about them, don't you know.

It was best to clump 'em before they pitched, wasn't it? Eh, Trellis?

Trellis scowled. But the plump youth did smite the next, full toss. Nobly he smote it: hard and high: fair to the hands of one of Tom's men on the boundary. It stuck there.

Certainly this was ridiculous.

They had run for the hit, and Lawrence, who had gone in first with Trellis, was now facing Tom. He lunged at the next without result.

"Steady, Lawrence, steady!" cried Trellis, from the pavilion.

But here the captain of the School House made a mistake—perhaps the worst he could have made. For Lawrence was a free and careless spirit; he was tall, too, and had a reach. Tom had taken two dramatic wickets, but he knew himself that he had deserved neither. He knew that he had bowled Trellis by a fluke; the ball had just happened to pitch on the blind spot and had just happened to break—this is not a phenomenon in cricket. Further, he knew that the plump youth had got himself out by hitting underneath a shocking full pitch. So Tom was very properly ascribing to luck what the onlookers ascribed to skill. And Lawrence might soon have shown them their mistake, had he been allowed to play his own game. His long reach would

have smothered Tom's feeble googlies, and his blithe confidence have knocked their bowler to pieces.

But "Steady, Lawrence!"—the command rang out to him, and steady he set himself to be. He cramped his game. He stopped a bad long-hop most gingerly. With a half-volley, innocent of break, he dealt unfaithfully, patting it delicately back. For the next, a plain, straight one, well up, he waited—and missed it.

Three wickets for no runs! More ridiculous than ever!

Delicacy imposes upon the historian a very tender regard for contemporary sentiment. With the School House of Claybury the subject is a sore one still; too sore for flippant treatment, or for further detail. Moreover, while the awful fact remains, its explanation must always be a bone of contention between Eagle's and their victims. Was it nothing but rank bad batting (as Trellis averred) that got the School House out for twenty-one? Was it (in the words of the plump youth) one of those rots, you know, that will set in, you know? Were those seven wickets for eleven a sheer fluke on Tom's part? Or did all three combine to work the miracle? Who knows? Each view found then, and finds still, its converts; wherefore their argu-

ment is futile. Besides, one must respect the feelings of the School House. In fact, we should respect them more than Eagle's did that afternoon, when, flushed with their extraordinary achievement, they continued to jeopardise tradition by helping themselves to a hundred and seventy-two, and finally, when the match was concluded on the following afternoon, by dismissing Trellis and his men for precisely thirty-seven less. But this was thanks to Hammond, since the School House second innings proved to be one of Tom's "sometimes" when they didn't break. So he retired after a few overs, to wonder how Bryson did it.

But Tom had won the match for Eagle's, and Eagle's remembered it. A fluke? He would have been a rash man to suggest that in the Junior class-room! A School House fag had the cheek to do so in the baths a few days later, but retribution followed swiftly. When he had come up gurgling and recovered his breath, he attempted to turn Eagle's weapons against themselves, and to splutter something about Strong's relations in the Army. But his failure was ignominious. Eagle's were forgetting the story of Sergeant Crump.

CHAPTER XII

THE BLOSSOMING OF BUTTERICK

WHEN he saw Tom beginning to stand on his own legs and likely to live down early prejudice, Brash felt a little sorry, perhaps, that none of this was his doing. His conscience may have pricked him for the coward's part he'd played. His weaker nature was impressed with the self-reliance, the seriousness, and the sense of responsibility of the youngster whom he had brought so raw to Claybury. But Brash had had none of the other's training in a harder school.

A little ironical, surely, that in his own trouble Brash should seek out Tom? "You're such a serious sort, Strong; you're sure to think of something," he had prefaced rather weakly.

It was raining heavily, and they had the Scriptorium to themselves.

"And I know that I ought to have stuck up for you more, Strong!"

Tom felt as uncomfortable as Brash.

"That's all right," he stammered, with his celebrated blush, and then, to turn the subject from himself, "what's up, old man?"

His companion had begun to fidget round the bookshelves. "I'm in a hole, Strong," he said, hurriedly.

His emotion showed in marked contrast to his customary air of somewhat *blasé* indifference. Tom turned, hiding his uneasiness.

"I'm in a beastly hole, Strong," Brash repeated presently. "I'm just worried to death. I want your help, Strong." He waited, fingering the books.

"It's this way, Strong. I owe no end of money, and I'm being dunned for it. I've got to find it."

Tom whistled. "I've none, as you know," he said.

"Yes, I know. . . . I mean, I don't expect you have. But you've a head on you."

"Ask your mater for it, Brash."

Brash swung round, excitedly.

"That's just it," he cried. "I can't. The mater's a fanatic upon debt. If she knew, she'd take me from Claybury to-morrow. I promised her, promised faithfully, never to owe a penny!"

Perhaps the recollection of another promise made to Mrs. Brash flashed across them both

that instant. And of the manner of its keeping. But Brash went on again :

"Listen, Strong. There's a stamp-dealer near our place at home. Knowing all about me, you see, he's been sending me down stamps for a year or so, on tick. I've sold them to the men for pocket-money, or swopped them for things I wanted. I haven't . . ."

"I know," broke in Tom. He was remembering the two Buttericks in that very room last term, and something they had told him. But it was a confidence, and he checked himself.

"Well, Strong, I've always been promising to pay the fellow. Finally I swore I'd pay him last holiday. But I didn't. I never went near him ; and all this term he's been writing for his money. He wants it on the nail ; the lot of it. He's sent an ultimatum ; if I don't pay up by next Saturday he'll take the bill to the mater. He means it. He says he keeps *his* promises."

A feeble smile accompanied the conclusion.

"You're sure he means it ?" asked Tom.

"Dead certain."

"How much is it, Brash ?"

Brash affected for a moment not to hear.

"I can't tell you, Strong," he stammered, when the question had been repeated, "it's

. . . it's . . . more than fourteen pounds, Strong !”

Tom rose, and crossed over to the window. But he found no suggestion in the rain.

“Don't say the man was a fool to let me have them,” Brash burst out petulantly. “I know he was, but that doesn't help. If he goes to the mater, she'll pay him, of course, but she'll never forgive me, and she'll take me straight away.”

Outside somebody went by singing, inside there was silence for a while. Tom's fingers drummed upon the pane. Presently he spoke.

“Look here, Brash, old man, I'd do anything. I wish I had the money. There's one thing, though . . .”

“Well ?” cried Brash.

“Let me tell Butter. He's jolly cute.”

The other's face fell. “Butter !” he laughed bitterly, “he's an awful ass !”

Butterick major was enjoying himself very much when Tom, having persisted in his opinion, eventually found him. With a gauge of his own device, he was gauging perforations, those perennial sources of embarrassment to the amateur collector. But you would need the very quaintest vagary of the comb machine's caprice to perplex old

Butter very long. Butterick minor leaned over his shoulder, watching in admiration.

To Brash's surprise he heard their story out. To Brash's further surprise he scarcely seemed astonished, and he capped all, on conclusion, by betraying not the smallest sympathy. "We always thought you were a goat, Brash," he commented. "And we wondered where you pinched those stamps."

Brash flared up. "I didn't sneak them, Butter. I thought . . ."

But Tom broke in, impetuously eager. "Can't you suggest something, old man. Brash'll have to leave unless he pays!"

"Serve him right," piped Butter.

"But, Butter . . ."

"Hook it!" cried the collector, "we're busy."

They were going, when he called Tom back. "When has he got to pay by?" he asked quietly.

"By next Saturday. Do think of something." And then a little shyly, "Do, Butter! Brash's mater has been jolly good to mine, you know."

For a full minute Butter regarded him steadily, but his scrutiny was not unkind. And at last, for the first time in the conversation, he turned to his younger brother.

"Eggs," he remarked, "how much money have we got?"

But if Tom expected any speedy solution of the problem, he was disappointed. For two days, after utterly futile attempts to borrow the money—who had so much in the Lower School?—Brash hung upon his skirts in a state of abject misery and self-pity, and the Buttericks avoided both. It was not until the Thursday morning that Butter remarked casually that if Brash could get the stamp artist down to Market Twyford on Saturday afternoon he'd thought of a dodge which might come off. Vague enough this; the veriest straw for any drowning man; but Brash clutched at it, and wrote for the appointment. Though how was Butter going to help them? And why? Tom could find no answer to his questions. Yet that chat in the Scriptorium last term had left him with a blind (and quite unwarranted) belief in the talents of the great collector.

Claybury were playing the Butterflies at home that Saturday, and the four secured their leave with little difficulty. For the dealer had consented to meet his debtor at the station, with a curt threat in conclusion that unless there and then he were satisfied, he must go straight back to Mrs. Brash.

A curious company they were as they went to the appointment.

Butterick major, carrying a parcel, strode on ahead in a mighty bad temper, snapping at one and all. Even from his brother he had kept his secret dark. "It may act, and it may not," he growled, when they tried to drag it out of him. A little aggrieved, Eggs lagged behind, while Brash trudged hopelessly, regretting—now it was too late—that he had given way to Tom, and left everything to the old idiot ahead. And Tom was trying stoutly to cheer him up.

Arrived at the corner leading to the station, Butter stopped them.

"You two men must wait here," he said to Tom and Brash, "Eggs and I will tackle the fellow first. Eggs knows how to put things. If we've no luck we'll fetch you. Come on, Eggs!"

He insisted, refusing to listen to any other course. Yes, he had got a scheme; and he and Eggs were going to work it their own way. If Brash didn't like it, he could leave it; for his part he'd a jolly sight rather they left it.

But up the station road his temper vanished. His face grew uneasy now, his thin falsetto trembled somewhat, and he looked every-

where but in his brother's face as he began to unfold his plan. "I'm a beast, Eggs," he concluded unhappily. "We'll drop it if you like."

Eggs—that brilliant man at "putting things"—came to a dead halt. He opened his mouth: shut it again: and gaped at his brother in astonishment. Then he made a sudden grab at Butter's arm.

"I'm on," he faltered. "I'm on, Jim."

Very rarely did Butterick minor call the other by his Christian name. Its use stood for something very intimate in their affection.

Mr. Pettison, Stamp Dealer of poor repute, was beginning to fidget in the First Class Waiting Room. His person was stout, his manner was fussy, his speech vulgar, and his reliance upon the word of Cyril Brash, Esquire, was absolutely nil.

In the interludes of comparing his watch with the big clock in the station, Mr. Pettison was reviewing the situation with some concern. His money, he reflected, was safe enough; Mrs. Brash would pay it on demand. But he regretted that he had so much immediate need for it. For the lady was a public personage in Hampstead; her activities in connection with the Council Schools and local affairs were common knowledge; so, also,

were her strong views, and the expression which she had never hesitated to give to them. Mr. Pettison was reminding himself that her comments upon his method of trading with schoolboys were likely to be very incisive, very painful, and possibly of wider damage to his business than the mere loss of a lucrative customer in Cyril Brash himself. Ah, but he wanted the money, wanted it urgently. No considerations less conflicting and less importunate would have sent him on that trip to Market Twyford.

Mr. Pettison, then, was fidgeting mentally and physically. When two bucolic gentlemen entered the waiting-room and deposited themselves and their belongings upon the chairs by the empty fireplace he began to fidget more. Their presence might hinder business. But presently, as a porter on the platform commenced to scream the usual unintelligible announcement, the trespassers rose in haste, exclaiming broadly, as if any train that afternoon were the last thing they expected, and Mr. Pettison wreathed his pendulous cheeks into a smile when two boys in the Claybury straw turned into the waiting-room.

"Mr. Pettison?" The leader was addressing him in a shrill and rather ridiculous falsetto.

The dealer's face fell. Neither of these was the culprit he awaited. The dark, raven eyes of the scraggy youth behind the spokesman searched his own uncomfortably. There was something of a dog's dumb wistfulness in their regard, he fancied.

"My name's Butterick, Mr. Pettison, and this is my brother. We're both at Claybury. And we're stamp-collectors, although we have never done any business with you. We've come to see you about Brash, you know."

"Oh," exclaimed Mr. Pettison, "you have, have you?"

The preposterous falsetto continued, plunging audaciously.

"It's your own fault if he lets you down, sir. You shouldn't have trusted him so . . ."

"Where is he?"

"He'll be here presently. But we are what you'd call his agents, to fix it up, you know."

"Oh, you are, are you?" fussed the little man.

"Can't you wait till the summer, Mr. Pettison?"

"Would *you*? Knowing the beauty!"

"Yes, I think we should."

Mr. Pettison used an exasperating habit of echoing himself. "Oh, you would, would you?" he flared suddenly. "Well, I won't.

And that's all about it. Here's my bill, see"—plumping an account on the table between them—"and I wants my brass."

"All right, easy on, sir. It's this way, Mr. Pettison. Brash can't pay to-day. If you go to his mater, she'll take him away from Claybury, and you'll lose a customer."

"Good riddance!" snarled Mr. Pettison.

"Yes, but it's a bit cruel, isn't it, to get him into all that trouble?"

"I want my brass."

"But we haven't got it, Mr. Pettison. You can't get blood out of stone."

"No, but I can from Mamma Brash. And I'm off straight away, young man, to get it."

Butter felt he was making a poor ambassador. With a glance of inquiry to Eggs, he drew two chairs up to the table, calling the man back.

"I say, Mr. Pettison," he piped, "sit down, please, and let's see if we can't fix up something. See here . . ."

"Is it money?" snapped the dealer.

"Sort of, Mr. Pettison." With a hand that shook a little he began to unwrap his parcel. "My brother and I have got some topping stamps in our collection, and if . . . if we let you hold some of them till Brash pays, will that do? Will you wait, Mr. Pettison?"

And from its wrapping Butter produced his celebrated album.

A queer look flashed across the dealer's face. He fussed to the doorway, then returned to them.

"No," he said slowly, "it won't. I'm sorry."

"Mr. Pettison!"

The absurd falsetto was rising higher. "Mr. Pettison, do sit down. Now, will you do this? Give us a receipt for the bill, and take . . . take the money's worth from our collection. Eh, Eggs?"

But Butter was not looking his brother in the face. Eggs nodded heavily.

"You can sell them at once, for the money, you know, Mr. Pettison."

Again that queer look in the dealer's eyes. He jumped up, banging the table with his fist. "No, I'm hanged if I will, boy. . . ."

And there he hesitated. He began to turn over the pages of the album, scanning the best stamps with a greedy eye. His need was very insistent, and business was business, he reflected.

"It's all right, Mr. Pettison. We don't mind, really."

The dealer was making notes on a dirty slip of paper. He looked up quickly, with one fat finger in the book to keep his place,

and an uneasy laugh at his own pleasantry. "Oh, you don't mind, don't you? Well, how do you look when you don't mind?" And presently, "I guess you're fond of Mister Brash?"

"We are," winced Butter. "Aren't we, Eggs?"

But—for once—no nod responded from the docile Eggs.

At last Mr. Pettison rose. "You've got some good 'uns, and no mistake, Mr. Butterick," he said, with a new accent of respect, "and it happens I've a purchaser for this yellow-green Nevis, here, and maybe one or two others. So if you mean it, well, I'll take 'em, and cry quits."

"Oh, yes, please. And do be quick."

The words might have come from some victim in a dentist's chair, waiting for the forceps.

In ten minutes it was over. The Buttericks' album was shorn of many treasures (will you ever forget that New Brunswicker, old Butter? or that ten cent Basle?) and Pettison had scrawled his receipt across the bill. He shook hands solemnly, as the London train clattered in.

But puffing to his carriage, the dealer turned back of a sudden, and rushed to them, very crimson in the face. He thrust his hand out once again.

"Shake, Mr. Butterick," he panted. "Shake! My mercy! You're a white man!"

For missionaries who had met with such complete success, the brothers' return was singularly dismal. And Butter told Brash nothing, excepting that they had paid the bill, as witness the receipt, and would expect him to repay them as soon as ever he could. He had no wish (or was it heart, Butter?) to explain the manner of the payment. And he smiled grimly, when Brash, sputtering his liveliest gratitude, promised faithfully—"faithfully, old man, I swear"—to pay him every penny.

But Butterick minor spent the remainder of that day in a very thoughtful mood. And after chapel he became eloquent for once.

"Jim," he whispered, "one thing's been puzzling me. Why ever did we do it? For a rotter like Brash, Jim!"

"For Brash, old man! Not much! We did it for Strong."

Eggs nodded. He was quite satisfied. And he left his brother gazing wistfully at certain blank spaces in their album.

CHAPTER XIII

A CROSS-EXAMINATION

THE sky was a wonderful blue; quad and Meadows lay in a flood of hot sunshine; from the swimming-bath came the languorous voices of the revellers. After a May of many moods, June had come in riotous.

But the Old Bird, seated by the open window of his study, felt moved in no response to this sudden stir of happiness. Almost he resented it. It struck with a sense of personal affront that he alone of all Claybury should be disquieted on such a day, and possess such solid grounds for his distress.

Presently he jerked his head round, and shot an irrelevant remark to the other occupant of the room.

"Lascelles! Bother their moral disability!" he exclaimed.

Thereupon from a cloud of tobacco smoke in the corner by the door issued the sympathetic tones of Herbert Lascelles.

"Yes, it is worrying, sir," he remarked

quietly, "beastly worrying. But hadn't we better make sure?"

"Of course, Lascelles. Yet I am almost afraid to. The thought of the whole thing makes me wretched. I like the lad, as you know, and . . . well, when I speak of a painful duty I employ more than a mere figure of speech, Lascelles."

The Old Bird had concluded stiffly, venting his resentment upon his colleague, as it seemed.

"I know, sir. It is wretched. But after all, he may not be the least little bit to blame."

"I wish I could believe so, Lascelles. Any other conclusion goes . . . er . . . entirely against the grain, I do assure you. In fact, my impulse is to shirk the inquiry, and leave it to the Head himself. But that's my weakness, Lascelles. You see, I am fond of the lad."

And the other read his thought. He respected it. He did not insist, as some shallower person might have done, that to assume the guilt of the suspect before the charge was proven appeared little evidence of liking. Mr. Lascelles had served through too many loyal years to lose that clue to his senior's character; his stern allegiance to his conscience, the perpetual war between a Spartan

sense of duty and the dictates of a warm, almost emotional heart. On several occasions, to the plain mind of Herbert Lascelles, the House Master had appeared a little rigorous, more than a little harsh, altogether super-conscientious. But the younger man possessed a broad sense of values, and his respect for Mr. Eagle was never placed in jeopardy. Each had a strong and steady affection for the other.

"You see, Lascelles," and the Old Bird closed the window with a sigh, "I'm bound to make this inquiry. You have not heard all yet. Listen. From what the Head indicated, the matter is much more grave than *prima facie* it seems. Very much more serious. The Head was . . . er . . . uncommonly put out, and when I ventured a desire to hear the real trouble behind it, he was . . . er . . . almost short with me. Hinting that he wished to spare my feelings, he reiterated that the boy was undoubtedly one from my House, and that at present my duty need only be confined to the discovery of his identity. Any further considerations, he insisted, might confuse the issue. Well, all this mystery in the background makes my task no pleasanter. Eh, Lascelles?"

Mr. Lascelles offered no reply. He liked

the prospect as little as his colleague; he would very much rather have been out upon the Golf links.

"We'll sift this together, Lascelles. Nobody else on the staff must hear of it at present, please."

The other nodded.

"Now, what are the facts," resumed the Old Bird presently. "I'll repeat them, and you will mark how they point, one and all, to Strong. We have the Head's word for it that the boy was one from my House. Well, only three boys in my House had leave-off that afternoon. They were Preston, Strong, and Derry. . . ."

The speaker had broken off, with a glance at his colleague to assure himself of his attention.

"Preston? Preston has been quite frank, Lascelles. He detailed all his movements in the town, and added spontaneously, before I questioned him on the point, that he saw some one in a Claybury straw in conversation with a rough-looking fellow. Mark, this dropped from him quite casually; but I am afraid that we cannot overlook the importance of that voluntary statement. Unconsciously, you see, and without any appreciation of its importance, Preston was confirming the Head's

intelligence. Of course I examined Preston closely—I felt constrained to go so far, with no loss of honour. Eh, Lascelles?”

“Quite,” interjected Herbert Lascelles.

“Was the boy Strong? Preston thought it might have been. Well, was it Derry? Yes, it might have been Derry; but no, it looked more like Strong, on second thoughts. In any case, Lascelles, I fear that narrows us down to either Strong or Derry?”

“Yes, sir,” said Herbert Lascelles, “I’m afraid it does.” And after a few reflective smoke clouds. “Hang Preston!”

The Old Bird smiled, but very wearily. “Well, Lascelles, Strong or Derry? At first sight, obviously the former. Which of the two is more likely to possess queer acquaintances, Strong from Pound Road or Derry from Spender’s? Poor Strong’s antecedents are against him.”

“H’mph!” reflected Mr. Lascelles.

“Yes, his antecedents are against him,” continued the House Master. “But mark! Curiously enough another little incident arises which seems like clinching our suspicion. Oh, please attend!”

His auditor looked up with a start. His body reclined there, but his mind had been out in the sunshine, standing at the nets again

while a sturdy figure of happiness puzzled him with googlies.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he murmured.

"I was saying, Lascelles, that another incident occurs to corroborate our fears. On the Saturday before that Wednesday I had Strong up; he had been fighting with Pringle, you remember. So the date is fixed very precisely in my recollection. A letter had arrived for him that afternoon, in a cheap, soiled envelope, shockingly written, so badly, in fact, that it had been flying about from one place to another before it occurred to the post office people to try Claybury. Now, when I gave the boy that letter he was very much confused. He blushed, and did his best, apparently, to hide the thing. He was ashamed of it, Lascelles. Really, I could not help being struck with his manner. What do you make of that?"

"Oh, I can't say, sir. By itself, it's little. The letter may have been from one of his old schoolfellows at Pound Road, you know?"

"Just so, Lascelles. Or, think, it may have been from the rough whom Preston mentioned. Eh? Making an appointment? It is curious that he should run off to Market Twyford on the very next chance that offered. Just giving

himself time to arrange the meeting for the next half-holiday. Eh?"

"Still, where's the awful sin, sir, in merely meeting an outsider, shabby or otherwise? That puzzles me."

"And me, Lascelles. But you forget the Head's hints. He would not have been so . . . er . . . upset, and have laid such stress on my discovering the lad, unless there were serious trouble beneath it."

"And those are all the facts, sir?" continued Mr. Lascelles.

"Yes, those are all." With another sigh Mr. Eagle crossed slowly to his hearthrug. "Too many, as I fear. Well, now we'll have Strong in. Will you ring, please?"

Torn from the excitement of a keen struggle in Small Side—and just as Derry had begun to look like making the first fifty of his life—Tom went clattering up the staircase and down the corridor to the study, flushed and happy. He wondered why the Old Bird wanted him, but his conscience was at ease; his only fear that Derry might be out before he got back again. What a nuisance the Old Bird was!

But entering the room, a swift misgiving took him. It was very still and quiet, after the din and sunshine of Small Side! and what

was Mr. Lascelles doing there, regarding him so gravely? And why was the Old Bird standing with his back to the fireplace? The attitude was ominous.

"I want to ask you a few questions, Strong." Mr. Eagle had begun in level tones. "You may take your time in answering."

Tom waited, standing at attention.

"Do you remember Wednesday, February the twenty-fourth? In last term?"

Tom thought a moment.

"No, sir, I don't. At least, not particularly."

"You went to Market Twyford that afternoon, Strong. With Derry. Do you remember now?"

On the instant Tom felt that sickly, sinking sensation which accompanies a shock. With a quick intuition of what was coming, his mind flashed back to a memorable afternoon. First he blushed. Then his face went white. His embarrassment grew obvious to both.

"Yes, sir," he said at length, very slowly, "I remember quite well going to Market Twyford one Wednesday last February."

"The Wednesday after you . . . er . . . came to blows with Pringle, Strong?"

"Yes, sir."

"You went with Derry, Strong?"

"Yes, sir ; with Derry."

The Old Bird swayed his shoulders forward. "That afternoon, Strong, did you have any conversation with . . . er . . . any stranger, in the town ? Now, make sure."

Tom was looking squarely in his examiner's face, but his eyes were recalling the picture of a mean street and of two figures whispering at the top of it.

"No, sir, I didn't," he replied quietly, while the masters exchanged glances.

"You are quite sure of that, Strong ?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, now I must tell you, Strong. A boy in the Claybury straw was seen that afternoon speaking in Market Twyford to a stranger, apparently a rough character. The boy was, as I have been assured on indisputable authority, one of my boys. He was seen, mark you, Strong. And only three boys from my House had *exeat* that afternoon." Mr. Eagle paused. "Will that help you to remember any better ?" he concluded, very gravely.

The first part of this exordium had filled Tom with nothing but an active alarm for Derry and his secret. It could hardly remain hidden any longer. But the insinuation, as he judged it, of the last few words moved him to a mood of soreness and resentment. Did they

suspect him, then, of lying? Unconsciously his head went up a little higher.

"How can it, sir?" he replied, with a restless movement. "I did not speak to any stranger."

Herbert Lascelles, sitting in his corner quietly and never taking his gaze from the boy's face, was about to interpose, but Mr. Eagle gestured him to silence.

"Very well, Strong. I have your word for it. And now I wish you clearly to understand this. I am not charging you with any breach of discipline. There is nothing in itself criminal in speaking to a stranger; scarcely an unnatural circumstance, surely? At present, all I have to do is to ascertain the boy who did so. Would you like to think again?"

But Tom preserved a solid silence.

"That being so, Strong, I have something to recall to you. On the preceding Saturday—the twentieth—I gave you, in this room, a letter. I could not avoid observing your—er—confusion on receiving it. You seemed ashamed of it, Strong. Do you recollect?"

Tom shook his head. Long ago the incident had been forgotten. And then followed some dim memory of a dirty, wretched envelope, and yes, the twinge of shame he had felt that his House Master should see the thing.

"Yes, sir," he began impetuously, forgetting his resentment, "yes, sir, I do recollect it. It was only . . ."

But the other interrupted him. "One minute, Strong. Was that letter from any—er . . . acquaintance who . . . er . . . might not like to come and see you here?"

"No, sir, it was . . ."

"Not so fast, Strong. Was it from any such acquaintance asking you to make an appointment with them in the town? Think carefully!"

"No, sir."

"It was not a letter of appointment?"

"No, sir." The reply came shortly, for Tom was chilled again, smarting under a sense of disbelief. Once more the quick interchange of glances between Mr. Eagle and his colleague.

"Well, then, Strong; to return a moment. You and Derry went by yourselves that afternoon. Did you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"There was no one else with you?"

"No, sir."

"What did you do?"

The last words shot out quickly. But not more quickly than Tom's recollection of his promise. "I want you to promise faithfully

that you'll always keep it dark, whatever happens. That you'll never let out anything." *Never let out anything!* And he had answered, "*Never.*"

Thinking rapidly as he spoke, he began, with a pale face, to recount their doings. He must tell no lie, he knew. But neither must he say one word which might give Derry away.

"We went to Market Twyford, sir. When we got there we strolled about, looking in the shop windows, and Derry bought some tooth powder. On our way back we called at Wraight's."

He finished in a cold fear. Would Mr. Eagle ask if that had been all?

But the Old Bird had drawn himself up, his shaggy eyebrows twitching ominously.

"Very good, Strong," he remarked with coldness, "that will do, at least for the present. Go straight from here to the matron's room, and ask Mrs. Miles to let you stay there until I send for you again."

But when they heard his footsteps retreating down the corridor, the House Master sank into an easy-chair with a little gasp of exhaustion.

"He's hiding something," he sighed. "I don't like the look of it at all, Lascelles."

"But I fancy he was speaking the truth, sir," said Herbert Lascelles stoutly.

"I hope so, Lascelles, I hope so. But now for Derry. Would you ring again?"

For a few minutes, while each was occupied with his own thoughts, nothing but the ticking of the clock was heard in Mr. Eagle's study. Presently, more to himself than to the other, he began to speak his mind aloud:

"Of course, Lascelles, one cannot request either to incriminate the other. We are not lawyers here. We cannot cross-examine one boy on the direct acts of his friend."

"No, of course we can't," responded Mr. Lascelles.

Both cherished a pedantic but chivalrous dislike for the methods of the Law Courts.

CHAPTER XIV

TOM BEGINS TO PAY BACK AN OLD DEBT

DERRY—cleaned bowled for forty-nine—was wondering what kept his friend so long, and when word came that he also was wanted in the study, he jumped very quickly to disquieting conclusions. A hasty review of recent delinquencies revealed nothing undetected, or black enough for a haul at such a moment. Besides, he argued as he made thoughtfully for the presence, it must be something in which Strong had taken part, or why had he been hauled as well? Now, whatever had he and Strong been doing . . . ?

Suddenly, within a few yards of the study door, Derry came to a dead halt. With the philosopher of history he might have cried "Eureka!" but with none of that old gentleman's gratification. Of course! And the Old Bird, he knew, had bottled Strong up to prevent their meeting and comparing notes!

Derry was in a cold perspiration now. What an ass he had been to let them find him! He wished himself back at Spender's

or anywhere but Claybury. Oh, if only he'd been given half an hour to think it out!

At which instant the door opened, revealing the form of Mr. Lascelles.

"Is that you, Derry?" he cried. "Come along. What a time you've been, boy!"

So Derry must smile and make the best of it. "Have I, sir?" This he ventured blandly, with an air of astonishment. "I'm sorry, sir. I was playing cricket, you know, sir." Yet he was wondering now, as Tom had done before him, whatever "old H. L." had got to do with it.

Finally, one glance at the House Master in his attitude of judgment sent Derry's heart to zero. But he took his bull by the horns.

"You sent for me, sir?" he inquired innocently.

"I did, Derry. Do you remember February the twenty-fourth?"

"Me, sir? No, sir!" answered Derry promptly.

"It was a Wednesday, Derry. You and Strong went to Market Twyford together that afternoon."

"Did I, sir?" parried the ingenuous Derry. He was fencing for time, to pull himself together.

The Old Bird understood exactly that he

aimed at. "Yes, you did, Derry," he remarked evenly. "And now, be careful before you answer my next question."

"Yes, sir," assented Derry.

"Did you speak to any stranger in the town that afternoon?"

It had come at last; the one thing Derry had been fearing. Curious, then, that his face should brighten at the words. And that he should make such haste to answer.

"No, sir."

"You spoke to no stranger, Derry?"

"I spoke to no stranger, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Certain, sir."

Both his auditors recognised the ring of sincerity. To the crucial question his reply had come without any trace of nervousness or hesitation, almost with an accent of relief. They felt that Derry spoke the truth.

Mr. Eagle repressed something very like a sigh.

"Well now, Derry," he continued, feeling carefully for his words, "I do not wish to ask you anything—er—unfair. I can neither request or expect you to—er—violate traditions of honour. But I think I am entitled, without any trespass upon your—obligation to your friend, to press another point. At the

same time, you need not answer unless you like."

"Yes, sir," lisped Derry, and wondered whatever could be coming.

"Were you and Strong separated at all that afternoon?"

For the first time Derry hesitated. His dilemma was insistent. Very quickly he recognised and debated the difficulty this question put him in. Had Strong been asked it, too? No doubt he had. And how had Strong answered? Well, Strong, he knew, would just tell the simple truth. Strong would not lie. No more could he. But, wait—supposing he declined any reply? Wouldn't his silence look fishy, for one or both of them? It might look as if he were trying to shield Strong; because if Strong had confessed that they had left each other and that he had just loitered or waited about, the Old Bird might easily infer that Strong had met the stranger, since he, Derry, was not the culprit. Oh, if only he had been given longer to consider! But they were watching him, waiting for his answer.

"Yes, sir," he said at last, "we were separated."

His boats were burned now. He must follow on to the bitter end. But one

thing . . . ! One thing, he determined, he could and would refuse to tell. Nothing should drag that from him, not even if his refusal meant expulsion. (The blood of a long line of loyal gentlemen was pulsing to the face of Patrick Terence Derry.)

"How long were you separated, Derry?"

"I don't know, sir. Perhaps twenty minutes."

With a great revulsion of relief Derry heard himself dismissed. He was safe after all, he joyed, and he had not said a syllable untrue. And Strong, too, was all right! But then Strong never had been in any danger, he told himself. Strong did not know (never would know) of his meeting in the back street. No, Strong was perfectly safe.

How glad he was now, that he had never shared his trouble with his friend! That *would* have made things awkward for old Strong! Ah, and how lucky that Eagle had not pursued the subject, how lucky that he hadn't . . . ! Phew! What a narrow shave!

And thus congratulating himself, Derry went off rejoicing.

But you would have rejoiced very little—you would have gone rushing back with the whole story, Derry, if you had heard what

followed when the study door was shut behind you.

"It looks worse, Lascelles," Mr. Eagle was summing up—"much worse. That boy never hesitated once, except when I asked if they had left one another. But then he did. Why? Because, as I read him, he was afraid of giving his friend away. You have always found Derry entirely truthful, I suppose, Lascelles?"

"Yes, I have, sir—and Strong also," added Mr. Lascelles, in a tone of grave perplexity.

"Just so. But note. Strong is discovered in a passive untruth. In his account of their doings he made no mention of their separation . . ."

"Yes, but . . ." began the other.

"I know. You were going to remind me that I had not asked him. Precisely. But would a perfectly honest lad have—er—glossed it over?"

His companion hesitated. "I don't know, sir," he insisted cautiously, "but I never have known Strong to tell or act a lie. Never."

"Nor I, Lascelles! Yet broad conclusions are very often dangerous. Perhaps he has never before known the temptation, or the—er—need of a lie. And it does look—does it not, Lascelles?—as if he had been

acting a lie this afternoon. I fear so. Oh, I fear so."

With nothing more to plead, the younger man rose and crossed to the window. He flung it open, almost testily. The heat seemed to have grown stifling. And his senior's voice went beating, beating on :

"And if acting one lie, Lascelles—if acting one lie, why not telling several. Of course I bear in mind another contingency."

"And that, sir?" asked Mr. Lascelles eagerly.

"The Head may be misinformed. Preston may have been mistaken. The lad may have been from another House. But these are all such a *may*, Lascelles; so remotely possible. Yet, while the bare chance remains, I shall—er—hold my hand."

In her room, meanwhile, the matron had been doing her best to cheer her prisoner up. Smarting under a sense of injustice, Tom longed to pour out his troubles in the sympathetic old lady's ear, but loyalty to Derry kept him silent. Not a word of the happenings in the study must pass his lips. Of course the truth would come out very quickly now, he told himself; directly Derry was examined, in fact. Then he would be cleared himself, and the Old Bird might even apologise for doubting him. But

poor old Derry! "I couldn't tell anybody; not even the pater"—how distressed Derry had been when he stammered that! And now the poor old chap would be compelled to tell the Bird and Mr. Lascelles, and who knows how many beside!

So Tom sat and brooded, his sympathies and feeling welling back to Derry, till Mrs. Miles, finding verbal consolation ineffectual, turned quietly to her universal panacea. "Now, just a nice cup of tea, dear," she bade him, with a rattle of the cups; "you'll feel all the better for it." Why, where was the old lady's formal method of address? Yet bigger boys than Tom had suffered that gentle familiarity; and found it very comforting in trouble.

The tea was finished, and enjoyed, when the summons came for him again.

"I have seen Derry, Strong. He has been quite straightforward."

Tom's heart thumped gratefully. Ah, then the Old Bird was coming to that apology. But—what was this?

"At present I shall report to the Head Master that I find no evidence against any boy in my House. I shall report thus in justice to yourself."

The Head Master! He had no idea that the Head was taking up the matter. The shadow

of an authority so august fell darkly across Tom's mind. With this new apprehension, he glanced quickly at his form master. But he encountered only a grave and troubled regard; there was no beam of kindly congratulation in Herbert Lascelles' eyes.

"And in justice to yourself also, Strong," Mr. Eagle was continuing coldly, "I must declare at once that I am not at all satisfied with your—er—explanation. I am very dissatisfied with it, Strong. You concealed from me that you and Derry were parted on that afternoon . . ."

"Please, sir, you never . . ."

"No, never mind excuses, Strong," the Old Bird interrupted with impatience, "you should have told me. You elected to hide the fact. We are only concerned at present with your choice. You are old enough to appreciate that having detected you in this—ah—suppression of the truth, I am compelled, in face of the facts within my knowledge, to question very seriously how far you have told the truth throughout. I will remind you again that the—er—individual was spoken to by a boy from my House; and that Preston, Derry, and yourself were the only three of my boys who had leave that afternoon. I am sure it was not Preston. I find no grounds for suspecting

Derry. Then to what conclusion am I forced? Against your word, I have the circumstance of the letter, and your concealment of the fact that you left Derry."

The Old Bird paused. It was on Tom's tongue to interject that Derry had left him. But loyalty forbade.

"And I do implore you to remember, Strong, I do implore you to remember that in itself any—er—conversation or encounter with a stranger constitutes no serious charge. There might be no grounds for reproach there. Even if there were, I could very likely overlook them. But if you persist in this attitude of—er—prevarication, then I must regard it as a serious matter: most serious, Strong. You have acted one untruth. You fail to convince me that you have not told others. There, and there exactly, Strong, lies the quarrel between you and me. Candidly, I doubt whether to believe you. I wish I could believe you. And so does Mr. Lascelles here."

Herbert Lascelles nodded kindly.

Shooting his shoulders forward, Mr. Eagle made his last appeal.

"Now, Strong, I do not ask you to inoriminate anybody else, if even such a contingency were possible. But I beg you earnestly to answer now . . . perhaps, before it becomes

too late . . . have you told me the whole truth? You had no encounter with anyone in Market Twyford?"

Tom's lips trembled, but his head went higher.

"No, sir," he said slowly, very slowly, "I spoke to no one."

As token that the interview was ended, the Old Bird moved back to his chair.

"Very well, Strong," he sighed, "very well. But come to me, please, at any time if you—er—think better of it. If you feel that you would like to tell me otherwise. There is a long month or more yet before . . . July. For remember what I told you on the afternoon you fought with Pringle. No untruthful lad can hold the Bonnithorne. Untruthfulness must be regarded as moral disability."

CHAPTER XV

UNDER A CLOUD

TOM and Derry lost little time in comparing notes on their interviews in the study. But Derry, having no clue to his friend's uneasiness, approached the subject in a spirit of pure relief. He imagined that the trouble had blown over. Mr. Eagle had omitted to warn him that some boy in his House had certainly been seen in conversation with the stranger; that in this circumstance lay the font and source of the whole matter; and that appearances pointed either to himself or Strong. Without this key to the situation Derry could not appreciate that his own answer might incriminate his friend; that by pleading not guilty he must cast suspicion upon Tom.

In the conversation which followed, each was hiding something from the other, Tom's loyalty to Derry, and Derry's concern for his own secret leading them into cross purposes.

"Did the Old Bird ask you if we were separated?" said Derry, when they found themselves together.

"No," said Tom, "but he asked me what we did that afternoon, and I never mentioned that I had left you. You remember, I promised to keep that dark."

"Yes," replied Derry, after a pause, "I remember. But he asked me plump out whether we left each other, and what was I to do? I couldn't tell him a lie. So I said we had."

"I know," answered Tom. "He told me what you said."

Derry's face brightened. "Well, that's all right, Strong. It couldn't matter much that you never mentioned it. The Old Bird knows that chaps don't speak of one another, and he's far too much of a sportsman to expect it. Naturally he'd know you wouldn't say anything about that unless he asked you straight out. And he didn't ask you. Oh no, he won't mind that."

It was on the tip of Tom's tongue to explain that the Old Bird had minded, and minded very much. But he remembered that this must lead to telling Derry everything. And he felt that Derry was sure to come out in a minute with the incident of the stranger, which would give him his chance of confessing that he had spied on him unwittingly.

And Derry appeared to be coming to it.

"But I say, Strong," he continued more nervously, "did he ask you anything else? Did he want to know if you'd spoken to a stranger in Market Twyford, for instance?"

"Yes. I said I had not."

"Good!" remarked Derry. "He asked me too."

"Yes?"

"Well, I hadn't either; so I told him so. And that will be the end of it."

But Tom scarcely heard the last words, for the first had sent his thoughts swimming. Derry had denied speaking to a stranger! and he, Tom, had seen him with his own eyes!

All at once he understood the explanation of the Old Bird's manner when he called him in the second time. Of course, taking Derry's word, the Old Bird had regarded him as the culprit, with every reason for the mistake.

Tom felt that he must leave his friend; must be alone to think the whole thing out. He muttered some excuse, and wandered off with his dilemma. Should he tell Derry, or not?

Over the old ground—and the new—his mind went travelling miserably. If he told Derry that he had seen him, and how he himself was implicated with Mr. Eagle, then Derry, he knew, would make a clean breast

of everything. Derry would never let him suffer for his sake. But what would that mean for Derry?

I couldn't tell anybody; not even the pater. Those words of Derry's, and the manner in which he had uttered them, were always coming back to him, with the dark shadow of real trouble. To the boy's mind they suggested some serious disaster. And that disaster would fall upon Derry if he had any inkling of Tom's plight. For then, he knew, Derry would tell all. He alone, he was telling himself, stood between Derry and some grave danger. Either he must suffer Mr. Eagle's displeasure and remain under the cloud, or give Derry to his fate.

And if he chose the former he must suffer alone. He would be denied the comfort of Derry's sympathy, for he must go on hiding everything from him. One word, and the mischief would be done. "The row is about the stranger, Derry. You did speak to him. I saw you. Eagle believes that I did. And he will take away my scholarship unless he discovers that it was you"—if he told Derry this he could end the trouble there and then. And—perhaps Derry would be expelled.

He remembered all that he owed to his friend, all that the other had been to him

at Claybury. Could he have endured the wretchedness of his first few weeks, his ostracism, and the bitterness of Pringle's spite, unless Derry had stood by him? And he recalled how he had vowed to himself to do anything—anything—for Derry. How anxious he had been almost for the chance of paying Derry back.

All of us have dreamed our day-dreams. We have loved to picture ourselves in gallant circumstances, doing great deeds for our country or our friend. But if the dream came true, I wonder would it always take the turn we picture?

So, too, Tom in his gratitude and lively imagination had spun many a day-dream in which he and Derry had held the stage. He had seen himself a man, suffering nobly, striving nobly, and achieving nobly—all for Derry's sake. But his dreams had never brought him to such a pitiful pass as this, nor had he ever imagined that they themselves would come so soon to trial.

A pitiful pass it was, he thought; for if he suffered for his friend he must suffer silently; none could lay a laurel on the altar of his sacrifice. There would be none to acclaim him as a hero, as the Old Clays who fell for their country were acclaimed by the Memorial.

These had won glory in the eyes of their old school, but he must invite shame. For nobody would appreciate or understand what he had done. Even Derry himself must never know.

Here, then, was his problem, as it crystallised itself to him at last; the issue to which all his pondering brought him round again. He must run the risk of losing his scholarship and leaving Claybury under the stigma of disgrace, or he must surrender Derry to his fate. "I must wipe those two minutes out of existence; I must just *unsee* it all," he had told himself on that fateful afternoon; well, he must keep his word to-day. It need not be supposed that he came with no faltering to this resolution.

The call upon his character was a hard one; but his early boyhood had been a hard one also. And something in the hardness of those early days was responding to the strain upon it now. Some moral fibre, strengthened in the rough gymnasium of poverty and hardship, was tautening to the test.

Whatever happened, and so long as he could do so without lying, he must save Derry. He saw no other duty.

Arrived at this resolve, Tom set himself to keep it manfully.

When Derry returned to the subject a few days later, he laughed it off, agreeing with his friend that the Old Bird had dropped it, or else that there had been nothing in it after all. Nor did it appear that Derry entertained any secret qualms. His buoyant spirit soon forgot the incident.

But there was another in Claybury who could not forget it; whose interest in the sequel was both grave and painful. In accordance with his promise, Mr. Eagle had reported to the Head that he had failed to bring the charge home to any boy in his House. Mr. Eagle would have given a great deal if he himself had been able to leave the matter there for good. He felt no desire to reopen it, nor did he intend to do so unless the Head directed. But he was oppressed with the conviction that Tom was holding something back, and was guilty of untruthfulness. It pained him to reflect that he had been deceived in a boy whom he had come to like, while he was haunted, further, with the recollection of the report which he must make in July to the Bonnithorne trustees. Twenty times a day he found himself regretting this provision in the trust; lamenting that the duty should be thrust upon him, of all the masters at Claybury; wishing that

the Council had sent their lad to any House but his. And the longer his sensitive mind brooded over the trouble, the darker grew the case against Tom, and the more painful his anxiety to save the boy against himself. "Lascelles, confound their moral disability!" time and time again he would repeat to the sole confidant of his distress. "If the lad would make a clean breast now, I'd snap my fingers at it!"

It began frequently to happen now that Tom would come across his House Master in the quad or meadows, when as often as not he would be asked, almost incidentally, if he had "changed his mind?" with a note in the inquiry that came near to an appeal. But nothing could detach him from his attitude of stubborn silence.

And thus between the three of them—Derry, Tom, and Mr. Eagle—the play of cross purposes went on.

The Lower School in Eagle's were quick to remark the subdued spirits of the hero of the victory over the School House. No doubt they would have sat upon him faithfully had he shown any normal signs of swollen head, but a little healthy exuberance might well have been expected. Tom had brought glory to the junior class-room, and its inmates recog-

nised the fact. They were ready to receive him at last with open arms, to make much of him. Judge then of their astonishment when he appeared indifferent to their advances. They were puzzled and disappointed. For he went his way, serious and unsociable, shrinking from every overture. They found him "rummier" than ever.

Now Pringle had lain very dormant since the battle of the Easter term, but he had neither forgotten his enemy nor forgiven. And he jumped shrewdly at the opportunity which Tom's depression gave him. What was up with Strong? he answered to his cronies. Why, nothing but quiet side. The fellow had fluked out the School House, and become too big altogether for anyone under Upper. That was what was the matter with Strong, if they wanted to know. Quiet side—the worst side of all. But what else could you expect from a bounder of his kind? Success always spoiled such beggars on horseback. Give them an inch and they'd jolly soon take an ell.

Pringle's metaphors were a little mixed, but his meaning was apparent, and plausible upon the face of it. Old Butter laughed when the rumour came to his ears, and Derry scragged every kid who repeated it in his presence; but the class-room came to accept

it as the only possible explanation of the case. And they resented it accordingly.

And this was only natural. For if we would make much of anyone and he refuses our advances, our self-respect is hurt and our feelings are in danger of turning round. Some of the bitterest enmities have sprung from friendship scorned.

Of course Tom was not scorning their advances. He was only too wretched to respond to them ; too absorbed by his dread of leaving Claybury in disgrace. He was moody and absent-minded. But he hoped against hope that something would turn up to save him.

He was brooding in this fashion after third lesson one morning, when an arm was slipped through his own, and he turned to find himself in the custody of Brash. Since the episode of the stamps, Brash had been keeping himself considerably in the background ; and in the presence of the Buttericks, at any rate, his jaunty self-assertion had entirely deserted him. But now that he saw Tom under a cloud again, Brash began to reassume a certain tone of patronage towards that unfortunate young person.

"What an ass you are, Strong," he began condescendingly. "I shan't drop you, you

know, though you have got such a beastly hump. What's the matter anyway?"

"Oh, nothing, thanks," said Tom, a little sore. "A chap can't always be grinning, can he?"

"No airs, my boy, or I shall fancy the men are right when they say you've got a bad attack of side. Everybody says so."

"Let them," exclaimed Tom, fidgeting to release his arm. "You know very well it's not the truth. But I say, isn't it your morning for private 'tu'?"

"No, it's not," laughed Brash. "Not to-day, my son. So don't flatter yourself you'll get rid of me that way. I'm here to have it out with you."

"Have what out?"

Brash ignored the question. "I promised to look after you," he went on with an air of easy tolerance, "and I want to know what's up? You can't kid me, young Strong."

"What should be up? I'm all right, if only you'll leave me alone. You weren't in such a hurry to look after me at one time, were you, Brash?"

Then Tom was sorry for the words. His taunt seemed a little ungenerous. "I'm sorry, Brash. I didn't mean that, really," he stammered.

"Oh, all right. Never mind me," replied

the other loftily. "Of course you can twist it that way if you like. But you haven't answered my question. You've found your feet now, and you could have a ripping time if only you weren't such a . . ."

"Such a what, Brash?"

"Well, such a sulky sort of brute. It's not as if you had any real trouble, you know. I could understand it if you were being worried to death as I was over that stamp bother. And look at me! I got through all right, though I still owe a pot of money to that old ass Butter. But I'm not fretting. While you go about like a bear with a broken heart!"

"You don't seem very grateful to Butter, anyhow," retorted Tom, who might have added that a little sincere "fretting" would have done the other a world of good. "After all, he got you out of it."

Brash laughed. "Yes, and he won't tell a chap how he worked the oracle," he sneered. "I'll bet you he rigged up some fake with old Pettison, and is getting a commission on the job. Halloa! What's up now?"

Tom had dropped his arm, and was facing him squarely. His eyes blazed.

"You brute!" he cried. "You daren't say that to Butter's face!"

But Brash had his own reasons for avoiding

a quarrel. For one thing, his curiosity was still unsatisfied.

"Oh, all right," he laughed, "keep cool. I'll take that back if you're going to kick up a dust about it, and we'll cry quits for what you said about me. Butter's a perfect saint, of course he is. But you're not, and I want to know what's the matter with you?"

"There's nothing, I tell you," repeated Tom.

"Very well, there's nothing. You're sulking just because you enjoy it, eh? But I tell you, if you don't look out you'll have something to sulk for. I fancy Pringle means to warm it up for you again now the men have got a down on you. You must drop this side, Strong."

"It's not side, Brash. You know it's not."

"I may, but the others don't. And anyhow it looks uncommon like it. If you will put their backs up you must expect them to pay you back for it when Pringle lets his cat out of the bag. So I warn you."

"I don't understand," said Tom. "What's Pringle saying now?"

"Nothing more at present. But I know—never mind how—that he's ferreted something out about you, and he means to publish it. You can guess what."

"No," said Tom. "There's nothing fresh to find out."

"Oh, isn't there? How about your . . . mater, and . . . her shop? The chaps don't know of that!"

"Well?"

"Well, Pringle's going to tell them."

But Brash's news fell flat. "Pringle discovered that my first term," remarked Tom quietly. "Although I never guessed how . . ."

"You don't suppose I sneaked, do you?" blustered the other, colouring in confusion.

"I never thought about it, Brash. I don't care much now if you did. But I always wondered why Pringle never let it out when he used to rag me."

"Ah, that's because you don't understand Pringle. He was keeping it up his sleeve against you, I'll bet! He didn't mean to play all his cards at once, you see. Now he means to smash you with it, and he'll find that easy if you will insist on offending every one."

"Well, anyhow there's only another month or so till midsummer," said Tom, to whom the prospect of Pringle's malice was nothing now in comparison with his larger trouble. "And I don't care a button for Pringle."

But Brash, of course, was quite out of his depth. He possessed no clue to Tom's counsel of despair.

"But you should care for Pringle, Strong,"

he insisted earnestly. "Just you chum up to the chaps ; they're ready enough to be friendly ; and then you can defy him if you like. Take the wind out of his sails, Strong. For I tell you frankly if you don't, if you go on snubbing them . . ."

"I don't," sighed Tom.

"Yes, you do. You may not mean it, but you do. You're beastly stand-offish. And if Pringle spins this yarn about your mater they'll just jump at it to get their own back. They'll revive the old tale about Crump being your uncle . . ."

"He's not," snapped Tom.

"Oh, stow it. Hear me out, man. They'll stir up that old yarn, I say ; and it'll go all over the school instead of being kept more or less to Eagle's. You'll come to the end of your first year finding yourself generally barred. I tell you, Strong, if a man remains unpopular when he's been here a full year it's pretty hard for him to live it down. New Clays and chaps that don't know him begin to fancy there's something wrong about him. And it doesn't help him with the masters either. You're an ass to give Pringle such a chance, Strong. That's what you are."

Tom recognised that the other's advice was well meant, and he recognised, too, the force

of it. He made up his mind while he listened that he would try to wear his heart no longer on his sleeve. He must buck up, he told himself, like the Spartan boy with the fox beneath his coat. And he had the sorry consolation that failure would not matter much, since the Old Bird was sure to report against him at term end. But he kept this to himself.

"It's good of you, Brash," he replied after a pause, "and I'll try to be better company and all that sort of thing. I don't want to offend the chaps. I never thought they minded."

"You'd mind, Strong, if you were constantly snubbed by a man you wanted to be friends with. But take my tip and come out of your shell, and Pringle will funk another rag. Don't forget you've only about six weeks to go through with him. He'll leave in July."

Tom started. "Pringle leaving? You can't say that for certain, Brash."

"Yes, I can. He's a Teyte foundationer like I am, you know; and he must go unless he gets the Drawford. There are five of us in for it against him, and I can whop him easily."

Tom remembered what Butterick had told him that afternoon in the Scriptorium.

"Yes, but you can afford to stay here without the Drawford, Brash," he hazarded.

"I daresay. All the same, the mater is dead

set on my winning it. And if I do win it I'm bound to keep it, which means the others going unless they can pay full fees. Well, everybody knows that Pringle's people can never afford that. No, you can count on Pringle leaving, Strong. He'll never beat me, my boy."

"You're jolly sure!" said Tom.

"Sure? I'm just jolly 'well certain," answered Brash, with a cunning smile. "As certain as we're standing here!"

CHAPTER XVI

BRASH MISTAKES HIS MAN

BRASH's confidence astonished Tom exceedingly. Whatever opinion he might have of his companion's brains, he knew that Pringle was no dunce, to say nothing of the other three.

"It seems to me, Brash, that you're a little premature," he exclaimed. "Pringle's been swotting hard lately. And you haven't."

"Really! I've wasted my time, have I?" sneered the other. "That's all you know."

But Tom held on stoutly. "Yes, you rotted all last term; you know you did. And you only began to buck up after Butter had saved you from the stamp row. You've had no chance of catching up. And the Drawford comes on next week, doesn't it?"

"I forgot. You're an authority upon scholarships, aren't you, Mr. — er — Pound Road," Brash sneered again. He was nettled with Tom's poor opinion of his ability, for he had imagined that the youngster still regarded

him with that reverent respect of the first day in the train. Our idols are hurt when we kick them from their pedestals.

"I know enough to guess they can't be won by slacking, anyhow," retaliated Tom.

"Well, you've a lot to learn yet, my child; a precious lot. I wasn't born yesterday."

And here Brash hesitated. Sore that Tom held him so cheaply, he tingled to astonish him out of his indifference, to show what a smart young man he was.

"No, I wasn't born yesterday, and that you can bet," he repeated, with a sly laugh. "And between you and me and the gate-post I've made sure of winning! See!"

He was not at all afraid of dropping this hint. Strong had only come from a beastly Council school, he reflected, and at such places no one would think anything of cheating. Before Derry, or anyone else, of course, he might have held his tongue; but he was safe enough with a fellow who'd been brought up as Strong had. And he went on, very pleased with his own cleverness:

"Yes, my son; I've made sure of it. All the papers are on set books, you know; and I've devised the most perfect system of—what shall we call it?—of Reference While You Wait." He smirked at his own wit.

"Have you ever heard of the Heathen Chinese, Strong?"

"No, I haven't," said Tom solidly.

"Well, he wouldn't be anywhere with me. And I'll defy Eagle or Lascelles or the Head himself to spot me. Oh, I've not been idle, my son. Not I! I'll bet my work bears much better fruit than Pringle's or anybody else's."

"You mean you're going to crib?" said Tom, very coldly.

"An ugly word, Strong. I mean I'm going to try some mechanical aids to success on a new patent of my own. Of course I am, you ass. I tell you my mater's dead set on my winning, and I should never stand an earthly by myself."

And then, very suddenly, Cyril Brash realised that he had put his foot in it; had been too clever altogether. Instead of the "By Jingo! you're a cool customer, you are!" or some such flattering expression, as he had expected from a youngster of Tom's antecedents, he saw disgust and anger flare up into his companion's face.

"I think you're a cad, Brash, if you do that," Tom was saying. "And I wish, oh I wish you'd never told me!"

"Why?" spluttered the other.

"Why? Because I don't know what to do about it."

"How virtuous we are!" jeered Brash. And then, with a sudden spasm of alarm, "Oh, I say; you'll keep it dark," he pressed. "Remember it was quite between ourselves!"

"But I never asked you to tell me. You volunteered the beastly thing," Tom reminded him.

"But I thought you were a sportsman, Strong, of course. I never dreamed you'd be a sneak, you know."

"Well, what are you, Brash? If you win the Drawford by cribbing?"

"Bosh! That's out of date, my child. And anyhow it's entirely my business. Don't forget that my mater's been jolly decent to yours, so I think you owe her something. You ought to thank me, too, for getting Pringle out of your way."

But Tom maintained a stony silence, so Brash went on, with something like a whine:

"It would be pretty low down, Strong, if you gave me away when my people have done so much for yours. You can't do it. And it's all to your advantage that Pringle shouldn't stay."

"That's just it, Brash," said Tom, when he had digested this view of the matter. "You

put me in a hole. You're going to cheat Pringle, and because he's no friend of mine you expect me to be a party to your swindling. And not only that, but you appeal to me because of your mater. It seems to me that you're taking a mean advantage, Brash."

"Bosh!" laughed the other, thinking that his argument was winning home. "The rest can crib too, if they like, can't they?"

"I suppose they can," conceded Tom.

"Well then, it's the same chance for all. You'll keep mum, I know. I always did stick up for you. Come on, let's go and grub."

But Tom held his ground. "No," he said, after a pause, "I won't promise anything, Brash. I don't know what to do. I wish you hadn't told me."

Once more Brash's mood changed swiftly. "Well, you'd better keep your mouth shut, anyhow, young Strong," he threatened, with an ugly look. "Much better, I can promise you." And he took himself sullenly away.

Misfortunes never come single spies, but in battalions—Tom had never read his Hamlet then, but he was reflecting, when he went in to dinner a few minutes later, that his sorrows were following swiftly one upon the other's heels. For how to act with this knowledge of Brash's baseness thrust upon him

was a further source of horrible embarrassment. If he held his tongue, he thought, and let Brash steal the Drawford, he would certainly make himself a party to the theft. If he told, he'd be responsible for a serious grief to Mrs. Brash. And then, with a sudden gust of relief, he remembered that in this bother, anyhow, he could consult with Derry.

So after dinner he sought his friend out, and led him across the meadows. He was determined to approach the subject cautiously, without giving Brash away. He began to speak in parables.

"Look here, Derry," he said darkly; "suppose there was a chap you couldn't stand . . ."

But Derry had no respect for parables. "I know," he chuckled. "You mean Pringle."

"No, I didn't say that, Derry. I'm putting a hypo-what-you-call-it case. We had the word in class this morning."

"Hypothetical," prompted Derry.

"Yes, a hypothetical case. Remember that."

"Right O! Fire away!"

"Well, suppose there was a chap you couldn't stand . . ."

"But there isn't," interrupted Derry.

"No, no; I said *supposing*, Derry. And supposing you found out something . . ."

"But I haven't," broke in Derry again.

"But supposing you had, and it was something that would be jolly bad for the chap you barred, unless you told him. Would you tell him, Derry?"

The oracle stopped dead, pulling at his curly locks. He was a little out of his depth. "Well—ah—I don't know," he began, in a manner strongly like his father's. "I'm a goat at riddles, old man. Would this thing I'd found out hurt the fellow very much?"

"Awfully much, Derry."

"Awfully much! Oh—ah—well—I suppose I'd have to warn him. It wouldn't be cricket if I didn't. Would it?"

"Well, suppose . . ."

"Oh spare me! Any more of it?"

"Lots, Derry." Tom felt that he was getting on famously. "Suppose, I say, that another chap who'd a sort of claim on you . . ."

"A what?"

"A claim on you, Derry."

"But no one's got a claim on me," protested Derry.

"I said *suppose*, Derry. Suppose this chap—whose people had been decent to you in a sort of way—was going to do a dirty trick . . ."

"What dirty trick?" cried Derry.

"Why, the one I've been alluding to. Suppose this decent chap was going to do a dirty trick to the other one . . ."

"What other one?"

"The one you barred, Derry."

"Oh yes, I follow. The hypothetical joker," sighed his friend. "But you do mix it all up so, old man!"

"Well, if that chap was going to do a dirty trick and smash the one you barred, and suppose by this dirty trick you might benefit yourself . . ."

"Yes?"

"Ought you to stop it, Derry?"

"Something very low down, is it?" asked Derry, ruffling his hair again, but looking most sagacious.

"Yes, Derry."

"Well, how could a decent chap do anything awfully low down?" Derry fancied he had clinched the argument at last.

"I don't say he is decent, but he's been decent," explained his inquisitor.

"Oh, I see"—but the assent came very dubiously—"well?"

"Well, ought you to stop it? Because by stopping it you harm the decent fellow . . ."

"And by not stopping it you hurt our hypothetical friend." The oracle was straddling

his legs and whistling. "Well, I've told you, old man, I'm no good at stumpers. But—ah—it seems to me that of course a man ought to stop it. If he don't he's—ah—as bad as the other two. He's not playing the game against the hypothetical beast, and he's sharing in the other johnny's rottenness. Anyhow, it looks like it."

"Yes, but supposing . . ."

"Oh, drop it! Let's get off and change. You're making my head ache."

"I've almost finished, Derry. Supposing you sat tight . . ."

"*I sit tight! I've nothing to do with it!*" cried Derry. He had, I repeat, no head for parables.

"No, no; not you! That's only the proposition, Derry. Like Euclid's."

"Euclid! You'd give him ten yards in a hundred, you serious old goat! Go ahead!"

"Well, supposing you sat tight and did nothing . . ."

"Yes?"

"And the beast was downed . . ."

"Yes?"

"And the other chap scored. Would it be your fault, Derry? Would it be your fault morally?"

"*My fault!*" gasped Derry. "How could

it be *my* fault? Oh, I'm sorry, I see. You mean would it be *your* fault, Strong?"

"Yes—I mean no, Derry. I mean would it be the fault of the chap who sat tight?"

Derry pondered over this. "Yes, of course it would," he said at last. "Yes, I think it would, Strong. But I never was a whale at puzzles."

"He'd be morally responsible, Derry? You're sure?"

But the oracle was exhausted. "Look here, old man," he cried, "you ask me again some morning when my brain's clear. Come and change now, and I'll slog you all over the shop."

And he pulled Tom off to get into his flannels, proceeding to keep his word by welting his googlies without mercy. But Preston and Marshall and the rest of them found Tom in capital spirits. For he was acting upon Brash's advice, to come out of his shell, amazingly. They had never seen him in such fine form. And Herbert Lascelles, wandering round Small Side with an eye for likely talent, told himself that something out of the common must have happened to the terrible young criminal, to make him so light-hearted all at once.

"I'll never believe it of him," he was muttering. "Never!"

Brash, too, marked Tom's rising spirits and augured that they boded well for him. The youngster had come to his senses, he assured himself, and seen on which side his bread was buttered. All that show of virtue had been very pretty, but it couldn't deceive him. So Brash was quite sanguine when he approached Tom again after chapel.

"So you'll keep it mum, old man," he smirked. "Like the decent chap you are. You'll never regret it, I promise you."

The answer considerably astonished him.

"I don't want to jaw about it any more, Brash," Tom was remarking gravely. "I've made up my mind. If you win the Drawford I shall tell the Old Bird what you told me. I must, Brash, and that's all about it. You've admitted you can't win unless you cheat. So it will be entirely your own look-out. If you don't win, I'll keep mum."

Brash laughed in his face. "Oh, will you?" he hissed. "You'll keep mum in any case, you little prig. I'll kill you if you don't. But you can't kid me, my son. You won't speak. Not you!"

Ten days later the Teyte foundationers sat for the Drawford exhibition.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MANTLE OF ELIJAH

EXAMINATIONS had come and gone, Speech Day was over, and a fortnight only of the summer term remained. The kids were marking off their calendars with crosses that grew larger every day, while those who were leaving from the Upper School had begun already to make testamentary disposition of their goods. Everybody was growing happily excited.

But in Eagle's there were five who violated tradition, five who were not feeling so happy as they should have done. And four of these went further; they were conscious of a distinct regret that the term drew so quickly to its end. They wished the holidays a long way off.

Derry, though momentarily transported by the reversion of a cast-off bat of Hammond's which "drove like beans," was unhappy on his friend's account. He saw that Tom had something on his mind, and was tempted even to soreness that the trouble was hidden from himself. But Derry did not succumb to the temptation; his sunny spirit could not foster any

imaginary grievance. No doubt, he concluded, Strong would tell him in good time, and he thanked his stars in the meanwhile that never another word had been said by the Old Bird about their escapade. That was over and done with, at any rate.

The cause of Tom's unhappiness we know, and also why his trouble grew with every day that brought him nearer to the end of term. Each morning he awoke to the hope that something would turn up to put things right at last; each night he went to sleep remembering that he was twenty-four hours nearer to the consequences of Mr. Eagle's wrath. Ah, but what could he do to avert it? Over and over the old ground he would go, but never find any way out. How, when he had surprised Derry's secret, could he make use of knowledge to which he had no right? How, above all, could he save himself at the cost of his friend? Never, never! He must set his teeth, and take what came.

Neither did the contemplation of the holidays give any pleasure to Pringle. Pringle was afraid that they might prove a very long good-bye to Claybury for him. He knew that he had done well in the Drawford, but he doubted that he had done well enough. He was regretting lost opportunities a little, now that it

was too late ; he was wishing that he had given more time during the last year to his work and less attention to his *bête noire*, Strong. He surprised himself in the conclusions that his manœuvres had brought him little profit ; that yarn about the sergeant seemed to have missed fire, he told himself ; ah, but he hadn't followed it up by publishing the truth about the little bounder's mater ! Well, if he'd won the Drawford, there'd be lots of chance for that next term. But would it be worth while ? Strong seemed to have the hump pretty badly just now ; and now he thought of it, Strong wasn't such a waster after all—he'd much more in him, anyhow, than that little oiler, Preston. A funny remark that of the Old Bird's, about a soldier promoted from the ranks ; a bit far-fetched, but still—? Oh, but what was the good of bothering about that now ? He wasn't likely to be here next term.

And at last, one afternoon when he had been pondering in this fashion, a new idea struck Pringle of a sudden. He had lost the Drawford : he was sure he had lost it : and he had lost it to pay him back for behaving so shabbily to Strong ! By Jingo ! Suppose the fates forgave him ? Suppose they let him come out top in the Drawford after all ? He'd never lift a finger against Strong next term ; he'd

keep mum about his mater ; and he'd make it up to him in other ways !

Either Pringle's conscience was pricking him or he sought to appease the past by giving a hostage to the future. Many of us attempt a cheap expiation in this manner. But few of us succeed.

The brothers Butterick—to complete the sum of our uneasy five—were also regarding the end of term with rising apprehension. They feared that it would take Brash from them for ever, and though they had no desire to retain him, they panted for the opportunity of filling certain blanks in their beloved Album. A very poor thing it looked to-day, without that Nevis and that ten-cent Basle !

Not a shilling had their debtor repaid them, and Butter's faith in human nature as personified in Cyril Brash was singularly deficient. Brash had promised faithfully to pay them every penny, but Butter cherished no delusions in the matter unless the pennies could come back next September in the pockets of Cyril Brash himself. (A view, in parenthesis, which was held also by the debtor.) And Eggs (that brilliant man at putting things) would nod his head painfully when Butter voiced his fears. Would they ever glory in a yellow New Brunswick again ?

No sooner, accordingly, had Brash come out of the Drawford than they fastened on him like two leeches. They pestered him without mercy on the manner in which he had acquitted himself. They made him yield up his examination papers, and when, after much toil and suffering, they had worked the answers out, day by day—whenever they could catch him—they took him through the questions *seriatim*. Insistently Butter cross-examined, while Eggs recorded the victim's replies in a clean new note-book, for comparison with the results they had arrived at. Brash proved much averse to this, and querulous; complaining that the beastly thing was done with, and he didn't see why a chap should be forced to do it all over again. "What had he said about the Statute of Provisors?" Oh, confound it! How could he remember now? The date was 1351, was it? Yes, he'd got that down all right. And had he given *all* the uses of the Supine and the Gerund? Of course he had!

Brash might kick, but Butter and Eggs were far too prickly to render the kicking profitable. So bit by bit they extracted from him exactly what he had done and left undone; and the more the results grew into shape in Egg's pocket-book the more difficult

they found it to understand the other's peevishness. For it appeared that Brash had done astonishingly well, especially in his dates and Latin Accidence; till in the upshot Butter was driven to confess that he was a jolly sight more clever than he looked.

I have written that five in Eagle's were watching the term wear itself away with no particular delight, but am forgetting those that sit upon Olympus. And to Derry, Tom, Pringle, and the brothers Butterick must be added two more very anxious spirits. One was the House Master himself, and the other that good sportsman Herbert Lascelles.

Although the Head had made no more of the Market Twyford incident, Mr. Eagle knew that it lingered in the great man's mind. In his own breast its aftermath was galling. He fretted, fretted very grievously, that Tom had not come to make a clean breast to him. He shrank from the tenor of the report which he must furnish, so shortly now, to the Bonnithorne trustees. This preyed upon the Old Bird's mind, till his work became a drudgery and a burden.

The anxiety of Herbert Lascelles took a more aggressive form. Never for a moment sharing his senior's disbelief in Tom, he felt that the boy was keeping something back; he

felt, too, that he would like to shake the whole story out of him. Claybury was everything in Mr. Lascelles' life; the prospect of Tom's premature withdrawal appalled him with a sense of personal loss. For he had come to enjoy a large and very kindly interest in the youngster.

Keeping Tom back one morning after second lesson, he turned, after some elucidation of a point that had arisen in class, to the subject at his heart.

"You haven't been up to Mr. Eagle yet, have you, Strong?" he remarked quietly.

Tom answered that he had not.

"We're very near the holidays, Strong. Don't you think you'd better?"

Tom bit his lip, but his head was held high enough.

"I know that Mr. Eagle is still very troubled about that affair," Mr. Lascelles continued earnestly, "and I warn you, he always keeps his word. Don't you see some way out of it, old fellow?"

Tom was touched by the kindliness beneath the surface. "But I spoke nothing but the truth, sir," he said, his eyes glistening.

The other sighed. Loyalty to his colleague forbade any admission of his own conviction; yet one bow, he felt, he might draw at a venture.

"I'm sure you have not told us everything," he said. "And I want you to count the cost again. It's a stiff price to pay for a piece of chivalry. And a price you'll be paying all your life, you know."

And that afternoon Mr. Lascelles scratched his golf, locking himself in his room. There he smoked much tobacco over the draft of a certain letter which, with his senior's permission, was destined for the Bonnithorne trustees, if the House Master's report took the colour that he dreaded. But how poor the case for the defendant looked in the cold advocacy of black and white! Mr. Lascelles frowned, stretched himself, and put the draft away; and "Confound their moral disability!" he muttered for the hundredth time.

While events were thus shaping themselves to the inevitable, one supreme penultimate interest held Claybury in its throes. This was the big match of the season, and the last one of the term, against Littleton School at Lord's.

To the fight with Littleton, rivals by election and tradition, the whole of the Claybury cricket season aspires; in the result of that struggle it culminates and is brought to judgment. Beat Littleton, and the season is a success; it matters not one rap whatever

other games you lose. Lose to Littleton, and no other victories bear any fruit of comfort. Which is precisely the aspect in which Littleton also regards the fixture.

This year Claybury were very sanguine of their chances. They had been beaten rather badly last, but looked to Bryson's googlies now to give them their revenge. For Bryson had been doing great things, and but the week before, against a very fair side of the Club and Ground, he had performed a feat which was already passing into minstrelsy.

"Ten wickets for sixteen
Made them look uncommon green,"

as in every House the kids were singing, jubilant and arrogantly confident.

When of a sudden their joy was turned to sorrowing. Bryson went to Sick Bay, down with a sharp attack of tonsilitis! Bryson would be unable to play against Littleton!

The blow fell on the Wednesday; on Friday the match was to commence at Lord's. Hence after third lesson on the Thursday an eager multitude flocked and gathered round the screens by old Crump's lodge; at any moment now Collard might be expected, striding over from Cushing's with the list of the eleven. But Collard came not.

Could the school have peeped that moment

into the captain's study, they would have seen a dejected trio pondering in committee. Eight names had been readily agreed upon, and now Collard paused, biting his pencil in reflection.

"But Littleton are a hot side this year, and we'll be dished without old Bryson," he groaned. "Well, how about Trimmer, for number nine?"

"Yes, Trimmer, I should think," assented Hammond. "He doesn't lose many in the field."

"And Vine?" suggested Trellis. "He hit well against the Incogs."

So down went Trimmer and Vine among the glorious company. And then Collard raised his eyebrows, ejaculating, "Well?"

Hammond looked up quickly. "Did you think over my suggestion?" he asked.

"Yes, but I'm a bit afraid of it," replied the captain. "Is there no one else?"

"Not in Claybury, old man."

"But he's such a kid, you know," protested Collard.

"All the same, he's jolly big for his age, Collard."

"And I will say this for him, he got me with a real beauty against Eagle's!" So Trellis, reminiscent.

But this evoked nothing but a laugh, and then silence, till Hammond, with the picture

of Herbert Lascelles in his mind, went on to press his argument :

"It's a big risk, Collard. But we'll only win by taking a big risk. I'll bet you Littleton have been funking our googly bowler. Well, Bryson's hurt, but let's spring one on them all the same. Really, I believe our only chance is to diddle the beggars out."

Collard looked at Trellis. Trellis stared back at Collard. "*It was a real beauty, honestly,*" he murmured.

Five minutes later the captain was striding across the quad, the sheet of note-paper fluttering in his fingers. They watched him coming, the multitude around the screen; they opened for him, closed up in his wake, tip-toeing over one another's shoulders. But in the front row, firmly wedged, stood Patrick Terence Derry; and no sooner had the sheet been pinned in position than this is what he read :

v. LITTLETON—*July 13th and 14th*

Collard	Coxon
Trellis	Dyer
Hammond	Wren, D.
Coghlan, H. H.	Trimmer
Lawrence	Vine

Strong

Derry gave one whoop. Then he squeezed, fought, thrust, buffeted, and scrambled his way out.

CHAPTER XVIII

v. LITTLETON

"For all of we,
Whoever we be,
Come short of the giants of old, you see."

So they sing at Harrow. And so, I always think, must the sparrows of Lord's be singing, as they twitter along the edges of the grass, eager every one of them for the rattle of the fray, or cock their cunning heads askew, to con you up and down when you first step on the ground.

But still, pigmies though we be, the taxis and the hansoms will come with a glide and jingle up St. John's Wood Road; and still there's never a care in all the world when the stumps are pitched, the sweet flannels waiting in our bags, and the sun aloft to watch fair play. How the turf smiles, and the screens, and the mighty telegraph—all giving us greeting to the home of English cricket.

Lord's was rather frightening to Tom, when he clattered after his comrades up the wide staircase of the pavilion to their dressing-room

at the top. From the other side, across the landing, came the voices of their foe, some changing eagerly, while others gathered on their balcony to survey the scene beneath. Fathers, mothers, friends, and the jubilants from Claybury and Littleton—so the stream flowed in, and yet the stands and benches seemed crying out for more.

And now they were in flannels, and out to loosen muscles at the nets, where you may be sure that Derry, the two Buttericks, and the Lower School of Eagle's came swarming as one man to watch Tom send a few down to his captain. In the sunshine, over his son's shoulder stood Sir Patrick Derry, towering, as pleased and excited as any boy among them. "Eh—ah, fine straight lad," he was saying to himself, "filling out well, too. Capital things those Council scholarships!" But then he was dragged away, to find a place in the front row under the awnings; for Derry was very nervous that they would not get a seat.

"Slow game, cricket!" piped Butter, as soon as they were settled. "Eh, Derry?"

Across his father's person Derry shot a glance which was intended to be withering.

"Beastly waste of time, we think," continued the tormentor. "Fagging yourself out for a blob first ball!"

"Strong won't get a blob!" roared Derry, rising to the bait.

"And being banged all over the shop—no wickets for a hundred!" went on Butter placidly. "Rotten game it seems to us."

Sir Patrick laughed aloud. "Strong's going to bowl 'em all out, you mark my words!" he said.

"Eggs doesn't think so, sir," replied the shrill falsetto, not in the least abashed. "He's a rare good judge, is Eggs."

Whereupon a sweep of colour came across the face of Butterick minor. But for once he failed to jerk his head in answer.

Two slim forms had come down the pavilion steps; they faced each other outside the little gate; one flung up his arm, and up went something in the air that twinkled as the sunlight caught it.

"They're tossing!" exclaimed Derry, open-eyed; and a moment later, "Hurray! We've won it!"

For Collard was observed beckoning to Trellis and to Lawrence—"Put your pads on!"—they could almost catch the words.

At the same moment a very stately lady had just come through the gate, and at her side marched Cyril Brash, but he wore an air of subjection which contrasted very

sharply with the manner he assumed at Claybury. And into these two, as he stole round the ground to find Derry and his friends, ran Tom; to be captured there and then.

"Why, dear me, it's little Strong!" cried Mrs. Brash. "Why, whatever are you doing in flannels and a blazer, Strong?"

"Strong's playing, mater," muttered Brash.

"Playing, child! When *you're* not! Ridiculous!" exclaimed the good lady. "I'm sure, Strong, you can't be a better hand at cricketing than Cyril is!"

This was not encouraging, but worse was to follow when Mrs. Brash took Tom under her convoy ("She's nabbed him for her collection!" whispered Butter, when he saw them), and settling him beside her proceeded very audibly to cross-question him upon the nice points of the game.

"And what's that boy going to do with the gauntlets and the leggings, Strong?" she asked.

"He's the wicket-keeper," said Tom, conscious that his explanation was a trifle technical.

"Well, he must be fond of cricket, to sit and watch it from such a dangerous place!"

But now the school first pair were coming out, Trellis flicking his bat against his legs—a habit which betrayed his nervousness to those who knew him—and Lawrence with his long

stride, slouching easily along. Trellis was a left-shoulder-left-elbow-forward batsman, somewhat rigid; and Lawrence, as we know, a free and happy spirit, apt to run very quickly into confidence and top of form. Given an over or two to settle down, Lawrence might trouble any bowler, since he cared no whit for names or reputations but took each ball solely on its merits. To him a half-volley was a half-volley, even though it should come from the arm of George Hirst himself; and as such to be received in gratitude and sent blithely to the rails.

In Ancaster, their captain, Littleton had that year something of a rarity—a left-hander bowling very fast. And starting from the pavilion end with the slope, whence the ball keeps breaking in to the batsman, to help him, it became evident immediately that Ancaster would require more than a little stopping. Claybury held its breath while one after another the first four beat both Trellis and his stumps, and Derry gave a little gasp to see the next, a most appalling yorker, stopped only just in time. The last whipped away the bails.

Back trudged Trellis in dejection, to declare in the seclusion of the dressing-room that he wasn't worth his place against a Blind School, but Sir Patrick began to utter fallacies about a bad beginning making a good end. "Rotter

game cricket, sir!" chirped Butter, in reply. Yet their spirits rose again when Lawrence spanked the enemy's slow bowler twice between cover and mid-off, and Coxon, very firm on his right leg, played an over from Ancaster with the self-possession of the nets. So presently the figures on the telegraph twirled round to ten, and presently the twenty had been passed.

And now Lawrence did a foolish thing. He was beginning to feel like a morning of enjoyment, to experience that sense of comfort which steals over the batsman when he has faced half an hour of good bowling with never a false stroke, and met every ball with the middle of his bat. He had been playing Ancaster, not feeling at him; pitting brain against brain. But it came to him that Littleton were fielding splendidly, and an evil moment whispered that a little bustling might put them off their game. He began to worry Coxon, calling for a few rash runs. And Coxon, usually phlegmatic, was upset by this, so that presently, after scrambling home by the barest of half inches, he called Lawrence for a tap to cover. "Yes!—No!—Yes!—Go back!"—and the two found themselves at one and the same end, while the Littleton stumper flicked the bails off at the other.

"But why's he walking back?" asked Mrs. Brash. And Tom did his best to explain, what time Coxon followed the weary way of Trellis. (And a weary way it is on such a journey, from the wicket to that far pavilion.)

Collard whispered something to his partner when he joined him, and we may guess it was a warning against such a style of "bustling." But Collard gave Lawrence no opportunity for repeating the offence, since the first ball from Ancaster broke the captain's middle stump in two.

Across the turf a groundsman came shambling with another stump. Under the awning Derry and his party grew silent all at once. Mr. Eagle and Herbert Lascelles, high up on the pavilion roof, began to discuss the abnormal pace of a Lord's wicket in fine weather. Three for twenty-nine requires some excusing.

"Well, Hammond's next," cheered Mr. Lascelles. "You'll never find a wicket too fast for him!"

On the long road out Hammond glanced once at the clock—fifty minutes to go still before lunch. Ah, if only he and Lawrence could stay there, Ancaster might begin to tire afterwards.

A burst of clapping broke from the men of Eagle's as they watched their captain come,

which dropped to an abrupt stillness when he had taken two-leg, facing the fast bowler.

Hammond crouched low over his bat this morning, much lower than his wont; and Eagle's knew that when Hammond stood that manner he was calling upon himself for something desperate.

Then for an hour all too brief the onlookers saw cricket at its best. True, the runs came slowly; till sisters and fair cousins, in laces and dainty frippery, began, I know, to grow a little bored, and here and there a mater nodded into somnolence. But grey-haired paters, whose figures were a source of anxiety and whose battles were all behind them, followed each ball with a stir of the old fever; with eyes that never left the pitch; with many a swallowed word of admiration. For they watched a sight which is the finest sport can offer.

Two good bowlers bowling at their best, success whipping their skill to a force that never flagged. Two batsmen nerved in defiance, bent on wearying their foe; two batsmen all vigilance and steel, watching every ball from finger-tips to bat. And a field on tip-toe, stopping everything.

While this stubborn work wore on, Tom, fretting to get over to Derry and his friends,

caught many a whimsical glance of pity from old Butter. But his manners kept him at the side of Mrs. Brash, and soon he began to notice that Brash himself sat ill at ease. He seemed apprehensive of something—and at last it came. For Mrs. Brash began to talk about the Drawford.

In a flash Tom knew what his companion had been dreading, and his own discomfort fell suddenly upon him. He had been forgetting (very nearly) the legacy of depression left him by Mr. Eagle; he had forgotten (entirely) that wretched business of the scholarship and Brash. And now the culprit's mother was bringing all back to him.

"We shall be so proud of you, Cyril, if you've won the scholarship. Shall we not, Strong?"

And what could Tom reply, remembering his resolution?

Brash's eyes were on the ground. "But whether I've won or not, I suppose I shall be able to stay at Claybury, mother?"

"No, I'm afraid not, Cyril."

"But why, mother?"

"This is neither the place nor time to discuss that, Cyril," answered his mother, a little severely. "But I'm sure you've won it, my dear. Don't you think so, Strong?"

Poor Tom! He felt a traitor, and very much inclined to throw overboard both Pringle and the other Teytes. Ah, but then honour would go also.

How he welcomed the luncheon bell a few minutes later, and how the school cheered Lawrence and Hammond, who were still unbeaten, with the score at sixty-three, of which Lawrence had never made a better forty.

Climbing the stairs to the dressing-room, Tom encountered Mr. Eagle. The Old Bird eyed him kindly.

"I am pleased, very pleased, to see you in the school colours, Strong," he said.

"Thank you, sir," blushed Tom.

"And Strong—?" Mr Eagle was pausing on the stairs.

"Yes, sir?"

"I trust that nothing—nothing, Strong—will occur to prevent you playing here for Claybury for many years to come. Oh please remember that."

The Old Bird meant well, but for once his tact had failed him. The moment was ill chosen for the hint he sought so eagerly to give, for the plea his words concealed. Already Tom's peace had been disturbed by the incident with Mrs. Brash; it only needed

this caustic reminder—as he regarded it—of the House Master's intentions to send him to the depths.

But the Old Bird could not know this. From the first he had misjudged his man, and now he thought that a warning in such circumstances as these might prove the only lash to whip Tom to his senses. In such a plain understanding of all he risked so lightly the boy might be forced to confession. For Mr. Eagle had made up his mind that if Tom confessed, he, in his turn, would forget the incident completely. So far, after much travail, had his conscience been persuaded.

Mr. Eagle's intention was kind, but its consequence was cruel. In the hour which should have been Tom's happiest at Claybury, he saw the sword whipped out again, and dangled over his head. He sat through lunch, a Damocles in flannels; he felt the sword hanging there above him. And as with Damocles, "his visions of happiness were all dispelled."

Mrs. Brash must speed away to a meeting of the Guardians after lunch, so Tom was able to sit with Derry and his father, but wretched company they found him. He was quiet and *distract*, his face a little grey; but this they attributed to nervousness. Butter

was attempting to cheer him up, when all their faces fell together to see Lawrence bowled in trying a pull, and Dyer caught at slip. Five wickets were down for seventy odd, and things looked black for Claybury.

But Ancaster's exertions of the morning were telling now, and the bowler who replaced him gave no trouble to Hammond. The twelve runs which he had scored before lunch were quickly doubled by two big drives, and a glide off his legs that came skimming to Butter's feet. At the other end Coghlan was playing with confidence.

And so to the hundred-and-twenty, when Hammond was snapped at the wicket.

Charity shall say no more of the rest of that Claybury first innings. Ancaster went on again, and Claybury went out. Tom, whipping in last while Derry and Eagle's held their breath, escaped a single ball; which left Derry with the consolation that "anyhow Strong had carried out his bat!" Claybury had fallen for a hundred and thirty-nine; of which Hammond had made forty-four and Lawrence fifty-one.

Collard's nerve must have deserted him when Littleton went in again. He had fully intended to start with his googly bowler. But Strong *was* such a kid, he argued; it

would look quaint to start with him on that huge ground! So Collard lost the courage of his conviction, and commencing with Coxon and Dyer, he saw fifty on the board and the enemy's first pair well set before he threw the ball to Tom. What time Eagle's had been fuming furiously, and finding more names for the school skipper than any his godparents may have imagined.

"Ah, but you wait!" bade Derry at this juncture. "Strong's going on!"

"Strong'll diddle 'em!" seconded Sir Patrick.

But Strong didn't. For the wicket was still perfect, and on such Bryson himself would have found it difficult to get much spin. But Bryson's experience would have saved him from Tom's error. For when he found that the ball would do little or nothing, Tom pressed to get the break. In that extra effort—as always happens—he sacrificed his length.

He dropped them shorter and shorter, or over-pitched egregiously. Till the Littleton pair began to feel a glow of satisfaction, and to hail the newcomer as one of those bowlers whom they would like to carry about with them. (Most of us can recall a pet opponent of this kind.) How they hoped that Collard would not hurry to take him off!

Herbert Lascelles fidgeted in his place.

In Derry waxed a bitter hatred for those two blithe hitters. Collard frowned—and sent Tom back to square-leg.

At the tea interval Littleton had a hundred and twenty up for one, and shortly afterwards they passed their rivals' total with nine wickets in hand. Then for a spell the scoring slowed again, but the second hundred was reached with only four men out, and a steady depression settling over the friends of Claybury.

Then, when hope was near abandonment, Hodges fell at last, caught very low down at cover by Trimmer. He had been there from the beginning, and wanted two more only for his century.

"But they're over seventy on!" shrilled the falsetto of Job's comforter. "And five wickets to fall yet! Eggs! we're licked!"

"Oh, shut up!" cried Derry. "You wait till to-morrow. Then you'll see!"

"I can see quite well already, thanks," chirped Butterick.

"Then, see old Trimmer hold that one!" shouted Derry, as Hodges' successor hit very hard to cover's left. Out shot Trimmer's hand, and in it the ball stuck. And thus another good man had fallen.

Almost an hour's play remained when the ninth wicket fell, and it seemed as if Claybury

might have to go in again that evening—for those last critical forty minutes. How often are they fatal!

But the last man poked a straight bat in the way of everything, while Venables, a stylish left-hander who had found nobody to stay with him, hit out with lusty purpose. So that it was not until fourteen minutes past six that Trimmer ended things with his third catch of the day, with two hundred and eighty-three to Littleton's credit.

"Pity, though, we didn't get the third hundred," murmured Ancaster. But Hodges laughed at him behind his towel. "What's it matter?" We've got them stiff enough!" he answered.

In their dressing-room across the landing Collard and his men were changing in poor heart. Arrears of a hundred and forty-four meant a large leeway to be made up in the morning—could Claybury do it, with Ancaster slamming them down the slope? Collard had his own opinions about that; but he was too good a captain to share them with his side.

And then the door opened, and the cheery countenance of Sir Patrick Derry looked in, a little shyly. "Oh—ah! Never say die, you know! Rum game cricket—very!" he beamed,

and crossed the room to Tom, where he was changing by the window.

"Oh, Strong—you're the man I want. The old—ah—Mr. Eagle—has given me leave to take you back to dinner. And—ah—to put you up for the night, you know."

But Tom blushed red again.

"Thank you very much, sir," he answered, a little slowly. "But I've promised to go home to-night."

"Eh—ah—very right and proper. Quite follow. Good lad—mother first claim, of course—always think of your mother first. Good lad—very!"

So to many shrill good-nights from the Junior School of Eagle's—they had thought highly of Sir Patrick's hospitality at tea-time—the baronet and Derry whizzed off in the big car to Grosvenor Square. But Tom turned moodily down St. John's Wood Road, to take his bus for Kilburn.

CHAPTER XIX

DAMOCLES DEFIES THE SWORD

WHEN Tom awoke next morning—in the old familiar room which he had occupied so long as he remembered before he went to Claybury; to which, as he told himself, he would be coming home so soon for good—the sense of his unhappiness was heavy upon him. He had said nothing to his mother of his trouble, imagining that he had hidden from her the weight upon his mind. But are mothers so easily beguiled?

I am sorry that Tom returned to Lord's in such a heavy mood; I wish I could affect that it had been otherwise. But reflect—and this for the last time. His imagination, as we know, was quick and lively, his nature sensitive, and his capacity for suffering great. He felt quite sure that Mr. Eagle would report against him, and that the Bonni-thorne trustees would be obliged in consequence to revoke his scholarship. And this when he had come to every healthy boy's ambition—to play for his school at Lord's. From that moment his new life—so strange

and alarming a year ago—had been transformed into a bright future; which, with its friendships and its prospects, he was called upon to throw away. He had climbed the hill, reached the summit, and in a few short days he must turn his back upon the Promised Land and go down whence he had come—under a cloud.

And, of course, his comparative success at Claybury was intensifying his loss.

All was cheerful bustle enough when he found himself at Lord's again. Both sides had arrived betimes, and the eyes of Ancaster sparkled, as he chatted to his men upon the balcony. Already Ancaster was tasting the fruits of victory. Round the ground the fathers, sisters, big brothers, and friends of Littleton were settling themselves with that air of conscious satisfaction which we all assume when our side is well on top.

Derry and Sir Patrick were there as early as any, and the junior class-room of Eagle's, watching for their appearance through the gate, followed the tall baronet in a loyal retinue while Derry hunted out for places. Not for worlds would that young fatalist occupy the seats of yesterday. They had been too "unlucky," he insisted.

"A hundred and forty-four behind!"

groaned Butter, by way of contributing something cheerful. "They'll beat us by an innings!"

"Will they?" snapped Derry. "Not if Collard gets going!"

"Ah—is Collard good—eh?" remarked Sir Patrick.

"Good!" Derry's blue eyes were opened to their widest. Fancy his pater never having heard of Collard! "Good! One paper called him the best school bat of the year! Why, his average is nearly sixty!"

"Guess yesterday pulled it down though," sniggered Preston, from the rear.

"Beastly fluke!" retorted Claybury's champion. "Collard'll pay them out to-day!"

"And there's Hammond, too!" chimed in Jukes.

"And Lawrence!"

"And Coxon and Trellis!"

"I say, ain't you forgetting Strong? Didn't he carry out his bat first innings!" piped Butter. "Strong's our man! Eh, Eggs?"

"I wonder why he doesn't come out to us?" said Derry.

"I expect Collard's putting him in first." This was a sneer from Preston.

"All right! You wait till we're back, young Preston! Hallo! here come the umpires!"

The august twain were emerging with that leisurely and heavy step which marks their order. How aloof the umpires always look to the excitement which is beating in the hearts around! We talk much of the impartiality of our Bench, throned reposefully in scarlet and ermine; but I am still waiting for the poet who will hymn that splendid justice of the men who wear the thankless canvas. Day after day they stand from morn till evening, in the sun's heat and (sometimes) in Arctic cold, anon in jeopardy of life and limb, never tiring, always kindly, watchful every moment, and magnificently just.

And now Ancaster was leading his men out, and they tossed the ball gaily as they came. "Same places," you heard him bid them, "I'm starting from the pavilion end." Trellis and Lawrence followed, remembering how much was needed of them before Claybury could start on terms again. Theirs was a heavy heritage.

Ancaster began at his tremendous pace, his length as accurate as ever. And Trellis, pushing forward at the third, felt it graze the finger of his glove. He was quite ready for the quick appeal that followed. The umpire's hand went up, and the steadiest bat in Claybury had obtained "a pair."

Followed Collard. But everything was going Littleton's way, and even he could not prevent the three speedy disasters which occurred. For Lawrence, opening his shoulders to Trowton, was caught flukily in the country after the fieldsman had first misjudged the flight. Coxon was bowled by a ball that might have beaten anyone, and Hammond, to the shock of one and all, was snapped at first slip from the last of the same over. In twelve minutes four of the best wickets had fallen for seven runs !

Nothing looked like saving Claybury now—for even if Collard stayed, who was likely to stay with him ?

Under his breath Derry began to mutter something about “next year,” and the two Buttericks had scarcely looked more woeful when they parted with that ten-cent Basle. Even Sir Patrick glared, but his “rum game cricket—never know where you are—glorious uncertainty—very !” was cheerfully audible to the company in the neighbourhood.

Beside his crease stood Collard, very grim ; waiting while Dyer trembled out to join him. Littleton moved jauntily to their places.

Yet it is almost impossible for everyone to fail, and Dyer helped his captain to take the score to forty before he touched one from

Ancaster precisely as Hammond had done before him. Slip's sure fingers did the rest. 41—5—11 read the telegraph.

Coghlan stayed for twenty minutes, making several poor strokes and three fine ones. The first rattled between the covers, the second eluded third man, and the third was a hook off his body. Alas! Coghlan had not noticed that man deep behind the umpire—and he paid the penalty of oversight. 63—6—8.

"I suppose we'll catch the 3.20 back?" said Mr. Lascelles dolefully.

"I suppose so," assented the Old Bird.

A stout youth was Vine, rubicund and self-possessed; and it will be remembered that he had hit well against the Incogs. But Vine was not only a hitter; he was a much better bat than he looked. Also he feared nothing.

He set himself squarely. He thought of Claybury, his *alma mater*; he thought, too, of his *mater naturalis*, seated by the screen; and began to drive and cut and play as if he were batting in Small Side. Off went Ancaster, off went Trowton, on came the change bowlers; and on also went Vine and his captain, till at last the atmosphere began to thrill, and the hundred was followed by ten—twenty—thirty—forty—Claybury were only four behind!

And then, in the last over before lunch,

Vine fell. He was caught at square-leg, off a mis-hit. 142—7—63.

"It's all over now, bar the shouting!" murmured Ancaster to Hodges, glancing at the telegraph as they went in. "Jolly good innings that man played!"

"H'm!" growled Hodges. He was hungry.

With two runs wanted still to save the innings defeat, and only Trimmer, Wren, and Tom to help their captain, it did indeed, when play was recommenced, seem all over "bar the shouting." Wren snicked a single through the slips, then sorrowed back again; while Trimmer went in, and out, immediately.

During these disasters Tom had been waiting on the balcony, in pads and gloves and moodiness. But now his self-pity had turned to something harder. He had fought his battle out, and despair had left him with a new strength. Very slowly he went to the wicket, in the grip of one tense purpose. He told himself that next week he must bid good-bye to Claybury in disgrace—well, here was his chance of leaving a name behind him. Tom was not a batsman, but at that moment character was making him a force.

"Two-leg, please?"—Collard's head went up sharply at the tones; the youngster looked nervous, but his voice sounded cool enough.

The fieldsmen drew in closer, to surround an easy prey.

Ancaster was determined that Claybury should not put his men in again, so flung his fastest yorker on Tom's middle stump. And the *plock!* as Tom's bat met it firm and true, was heard in the pavilion.

"Over!" called the umpire.

From the other end Collard hit a speedy four, while wild cheers acclaimed his fifty and Claybury's saving of the innings' defeat. And next from a late cut they had run two, when Collard called again. "No!" shouted Tom, "get back!" And then Collard realised his partner's nerve. "He's got his wits about him," he thought. "He wants me to keep the bowling."

From the last ball they stole a single, which brought Collard facing Ancaster again; and now the Claybury captain was playing in a manner to justify the eulogies of the cricket scribes. Three times he drove Ancaster to the ropes.

All was stillness in the quarter where Sir Patrick's party sat. Derry's eyes shone. Butter was vowing innumerable stamps to the deities of cricket if Strong could "only stay there." "Eggs," he whispered, "we'll give him that set of Wurtemberg if he makes twenty."

In the next few overs Collard kept most of the bowling, and passed his seventy; and then Ancaster took Trowton off, and Tom found himself with an over from Venables before him. Now Venables bowled cunningly; high he pitched them, outside the off stump; and when Tom had played two, and left one alone which was shorter, faster, and going away, there assailed him that tingling temptation to hit which all batsmen know so well. But even as the ball came curling up, he remembered dourly that he was there to stay, to stay as long as Collard—and Claybury—needed him. He beat the impulse back. And this was the crisis in his innings' fortunes. For now, temptation overcome and all his sturdy frame and mind and muscle concentrated on one sole object, he fought only to make Claybury remember him. Collard, I know, could have hugged the grim little figure that held its own so bravely.

The hundred and ninety was up—Claybury were almost fifty on! Greybeards in the pavilion were beginning to recall last-wicket stands of yesteryear.

"Rum game cricket—rum game—very," reiterated Sir Patrick. "Ah! Well *hit*, sir! Run it out!"

Tom had got his first four, clean run, from a full toss on his legs.

And now a tornado had greeted Claybury's second century : and now Ancaster had retired once more into the long field : and now the fieldsmen were tense and anxious. Dim stories of victories snatched from the jaws of blank defeat came back to them unpleasantly.

Claybury was hanging on every ball. A little group of the masters had instinctively collected, and with them stood the Head, his serenity forgotten. Would Collard make his hundred ?

Aye, Collard would, with a square cut and a single, and Tom—"A youngster from your House, eh, Eagle?" jerked the Head. "The Bonnithorne boy? Oh yes; how very interesting!"—got another four, and then a ball that should have bowled him beat his wicket and the keeper.

But at last Collard's magnificent innings was ended. Hitting under a very short one, he was caught at extra-cover. How Claybury rushed over the ground to them, as the two came panting in! Collard had made a hundred and ten, and Tom twenty-six not out. Claybury were only eighty-nine on, but that last stand had redeemed their reputation.

While Collard was leading his men out,

and Rust and Hodges were following behind, Littleton settled down in comfort to watch the runs knocked off. Thank goodness, ninety wouldn't take much making! But it *had* looked fishy at one time!

A hush held the onlookers as Rust moved to the far wicket. "Why, how funny the Claybury field are standing!" exclaimed sisters and fair cousins. "And look! Do look! If that little boy isn't going to bowl!"

Tom knew, knew of a surety, that he was about to bowl well. I believe something told him that his work for Claybury was still to complete.

But he did not know that the wicket, being a trifle worn, would make all the difference for him. He would not have to press for spin as yesterday, for a worn wicket takes the googlier's off- and leg-break easily.

Unhappily for himself, Rust was ignorant of this also. He bethought how much he had enjoyed the googly bowler the day before, and was a little astonished when the flight of the first ball beat him altogether. "Beastly fluke!" he reflected, and at the next he gave a mighty smack.

"Oh! Well *bowled*, sir!" This in the highest falsetto that has ever startled Lord's. Rust's wicket was in pieces.

It seemed to Tom that the third ball slipped out of his hand too soon ; it was well up, and the batsman should not have played back to it. He was waiting for the break—and he waited that fatal instant too long.

“Oh ! Well. . . .” But somebody’s hand was clapped on Butter’s mouth. “Eggs ! those blue Paraguays too !” he spluttered, when his lips were free.

Then Lord’s awoke to realise that something unusual was happening. On their balcony Littleton began to fidget.

“Just keep a good length,” bade Collard, when he tossed the ball to Wren. “Keep the runs down.”

And Wren obeyed with a beautiful maiden, and another and another. But Hodge’s new partner had played googlies before, so slowly the score passed the twenty. With eight wickets in hand Littleton wanted less than seventy now.

Their hopes were rising—when Hodges scraped forward to Tom, lifting his toe off the crease. Quick as lightning Trellis had the bails off. And the umpire’s hand went up.

At that moment were the Lower School of Eagle’s struck numb with the enormity of their presumption. However had they dared to rag young Strong !

"I must hit him off!" thought Ancaster, swinging to the vacant crease. But you hit too soon, friend Ancaster; and Trimmer's hands were just as safe as ever. And when Wren, spurred to emulation, had bowled Venables, the telegraph showed 21—5—4, and Herbert Lascelles was pacing the pavilion like one possessed.

No interval for tea now, at such a fateful moment; so enter Trowton, to play quietly and watch Stonor jump out twice to Tom, sweeping him round on the full pitch. "Thirty's *up*!" cried some one on the rails. Littleton might do it yet.

"One more over, Strong," whispered Col-lard. "I daren't keep you on if they hit you."

Now Stonor had been watching Tom's wrist closely, and he had just come to the conclusion, after another four, that he had mastered the secret of the break. He could tell at the moment of delivery the leg break from the off. He crouched for one, a little under-pitched. "Ah, this will break away," he thought, moving his leg across to hit it. But it didn't. It broke in to him: it ran up the shoulder of his bat: it dropped into Trellis' gloved hands. 36—6—17.

If ever a silence could be felt, you could

have felt the hush that enveloped Taylor as he came down the steps—as he wended over the turf—as he took his guard. It added to his nervousness. So he hit wildly at the next, and returned in a stillness just as awful. No longer could Claybury trust its voice to cheer. 36—7—0.

And then Collard showed a touch of generalship. He was not a great bowler, but he could fire them down fast. He took Wren off, and unloosed himself upon the Littleton tail. Thring's bail was flicked away in his second over (41—8—1), and in his next Dorrity stopped a straight one with his pads (45—9—2).

Littleton's feelings had passed expression. Two hours ago they had held victory in their hands! And now——!

Trowton, who had been playing steadily, was facing Tom again. He stepped out and drove one very hard and straight.

"Catch it! O catch it!" screamed a voice—and Tom had caught it, high up over his head. And by forty-four runs Claybury had won one of the most remarkable games in the annals of public school cricket.

Over the ropes they swarmed: shoulder-high they bore in Tom and Collard and Vine: hats, sticks, and umbrellas went soaring to

the sky. Old men were patting each other's backs, like schoolboys.

(*Note.*—At the request of many Old Clays the full score of this memorable game is appended. It will be remarked that Strong took seven wickets for twenty-two runs in Littleton's second innings, and that for Littleton Ancaster took eleven for ninety-six, in all.)

CLAYBURY v. LITTLETON

CLAYBURY

First Innings.

P. F. Trellis, b. Ancaster	0
G. Lawrence, b. Ancaster	51
H. G. Coxon, run out . .	7
R. Collard, b. Ancaster .	0
G. C. Hammond, c. Rust, b. Venables	44
W. Dyer, c. Taylor, b. Trowton	1
H. H. Coghlan, c. Thring, b. Ancaster	15
N. E. Vine, b. Trowton .	3
D. Wren, b. Ancaster . .	0
K. L. Trimmer, b. An- caster	9
T. Strong, not out . . .	0
B. 6, w. 2, l.b. 1 . .	9
	<hr/> 139

Second Innings.

c. Rust, b. Ancaster . .	0
c. Dorrity, b. Trowton .	2
b. Ancaster	1
c. Hodges, b. Taylor . .	110
c. Burnaby, b. Ancaster .	0
c. Burnaby, b. Ancaster .	11
c. Straw, b. Ancaster . .	8
c. Thring, b. Stonor . .	63
b. Trowton	1
b. Trowton	0
not out	26
B. 8, w. 1, l.b. 2 . .	11
	<hr/> 233

LITTLETON

<i>First Innings.</i>		<i>Second Innings.</i>	
R. C. Rust, c. Dyer, b.		b. Strong	0
Wren	78	st. Trellis, b. Strong . . .	11
F. Hodges, c. Trimmer, b.		b. Strong	0
Wren	98	c. Trellis, b. Strong . . .	17
L. Burnaby, l.b.w., b. Dyer	13	a. Trimmer, b. Strong . . .	0
C. E. Stonor, c. Vine, b.		b. Wren	4
Coxon	27	c. and b. Strong	8
R. F. Ancaster, c. Trellis,		b. Strong	0
b. Collard	2	b. Collard	1
D. Venables, not out . . .	34	l.b.w., b. Collard	2
E. S. Trowton, c. Trimmer,		not out	0
b. Dyer	3	B. 1, l.b. 1	2
P. Taylor, b. Coghlan . . .	0		
J. Townsend-Thring, b.			
Coghlan	3		
R. O. Dorrity, st. Trellis,			
b. Dyer	4		
E. Straw, c. Trimmer, b.			
Dyer	6		
B. 9, w. 3, l.b. 1, n.b. 2 .	15		
	283		45

LITTLETON BOWLING

<i>First Innings.</i>				<i>Second Innings.</i>			
Overs.	Mdns.	Runs.	Wkts.	Overs.	Mdns.	Runs.	Wkts.
Ancaster, 18·1	7	37	6	27	7	59	5
Trowton, 13	2	46	2	21	3	36	3
Venables, 12	1	47	1	10	2	38	0
				Stonor, 14	1	49	1
				Taylor, 12·2	3	23	1
				Dorrity, 7	0	17	0

CLAYBURY BOWLING

<i>First Innings.</i>				<i>Second Innings.</i>			
Overs	Mdns.	Runs.	Wkts.	Overs.	Mdns.	Runs.	Wkts.
Coxon, 25	4	56	1				
Dyer, 27·3	6	70	4				
Strong, 9	0	61	0	10·1	6	22	7
Wren, 18	3	21	2	7	3	14	1
Collard, 10	1	33	1	3	1	7	2
Coghlan, 20	6	27	2				

Umpires—R. A. CHARLSON and B. CURWYN.

CHAPTER XX

RUAT CŒLUM!

"No, Sir Patrick," Mr. Eagle was saying while the throng still cheered and thronged round the pavilion, "I am afraid Derry must return with the others this evening. But since you ask it I should like you to take Strong back with you."

"Would you though?"

"Yes, Sir Patrick. And keep him till Monday if you will. A chat with you may do him good. I fear he has—er—something on his mind."

"Has he though?" said Sir Patrick.

"Yes, I think so. Perhaps you can—er—help him, Sir Patrick."

The baronet looked alarmed. "Eh! Ah! Yes!" he exclaimed, fondling his moustache. "But you know, Eagle, I'm no good at, ah, that sort of thing, you know. Never was, you know."

"Well, anyhow I will give him his *exeat*, and many thanks, indeed. Good night to you, Sir Patrick."

The school were returning straight away

to Claybury, but the baronet had been anxious to take Derry and his chum back with him for the week-end. Mr. Eagle, however, had his own reasons for wishing Tom to go alone. He had a strong liking for Derry's father, and he felt that he might succeed where he himself had failed, and win Tom over to a gentler frame of mind.

The Junior School of Eagle's watched Tom with a little natural envy when he was carried off in such company, and once again they were moved to marvel that ever they had ragged him! Had he not taken seven Littleton wickets for twenty-two, and won the match for Claybury! In living recollection no such glory had been shed before upon Eagle's and its class-room. They wanted to take Strong back with them, to make a hero of him.

And what were Tom's feelings, as he sat presently at dinner with Sir Patrick? Delight and honest pride in his success were calling in him for sympathy, while this glimpse of yet another world so different from any he had known—the tall footmen who had received them, the handsome appointments of the table, the easy comfort which surrounded him—awakened emotions not dissimilar to those which he had experienced when first confronted with the Memorial at Claybury. His mood became softer and more pliant.

"And now," remarked Sir Patrick, when

the coffee had been served, "I expect you're a bit tired, eh?"

"Just a little, sir," said Tom.

"Yes. Well, we won't go to a theatre to-night then. Theatres will wait till you and Pat come up for the holidays. I'm expecting you both here for a week, you know; before we go to Ireland."

"Oh, please sir, it's very kind of you," blushed Tom. "But I can't come, thank you, sir."

"Eh—ah! Nonsense! Of course you can." And then with a little shock Sir Patrick recalled the Old Bird's hint. "Yes, and your mother must spare you for a fortnight or so in Ireland afterwards," he added, beating about his mind for an opening.

So presently he steered the conversation round to Tom's home and his life before he went to Claybury. Under his genial influence Tom expanded, and began to talk as he had never done before, while his host led him on, throwing in a question here and there, and telling himself that he ought to have been a diplomatist. They were doing famously.

"And, ah, I suppose you're awfully fond of Claybury," he inquired presently. "You're very happy there?"

Tom's hesitation was palpable. "Yes, I like the fellows, sir," he said at last.

"Ah, doesn't say he's happy," thought Sir Patrick. "Awkward ground here. Must go carefully." He began to feel embarrassed, and was very busy for awhile folding up his napkin. "Ah — good fellows — very," he observed. "Good school—best time of your life—lots of jolly years before you."

There he waited, for the other to respond. But no answer was forthcoming.

Sir Patrick made his plunge.

"Ah, sorry if I seem inquisitive, Strong," he began shyly, "shocking bad form—curiosity. But for a man who's just won a big match for his school you don't seem quite so—ah—chirpy, as you might be. Anything wrong?"

Tom longed to unburden something of his trouble. He never doubted that his resolution was the right one—he had fought that out weeks ago—but he had needed, so badly, a friend's encouragement; feeling, like all of us, the ache for sympathy. And the recollection that his action was approved by this kindly man of the world would be a help to him, he thought, in seeing the thing through. But he must be careful to keep Derry out of it.

"I am worried, sir," he burst out. "I'd like to ask your advice. If you don't mind, please?"

"Fire away!" cried Sir Patrick, feeling that he was in for it.

"Well, sir. If a man discovers something

that he should not have discovered, should he act as if he knew nothing of it?"

"Eh—ah? Say that again," bade the other. Tom repeated his proposition.

"Oh! Eh! Oh dear, yes; unless he's one of those detective fellows, you know, Strong. Rum fellows detectives—suppose they're allowed a different—ah—code to other people."

"Then, sir, if he's seen something which he has no right to see, he should just behave as if he'd never seen it?"

"Eh? Say that again," reiterated Sir Patrick.

Tom obeyed, while his hearer folded up his napkin for the second time. "Yes, yes; no doubt about it," he declared, when Tom had finished, "a decent fellow will just behave—as if he'd seen nothing. Oh, of course."

"Whatever might happen, sir?"

"Eh? Whatever might happen," mused Sir Patrick. "Ah—yes, Strong. Whatever happens. Like those—ah—Sepoy servants in the Mutiny, you know, who let themselves be killed rather than tell which way their sahib had escaped. Fine fellows those—very!" A pause followed, during which Tom's eyes were on the tablecloth. Then he looked up frankly.

"In a way, sir, something like that," he said. "In a very little way, of course. Suppose the man who'd seen what he shouldn't see

were in a mess, but could get out of it by splitting on what he'd seen? Of course he mustn't, must he?"

"As bad as that, is it?" thought Sir Patrick, his pleasant features sadly puckered. "A real—ah—serious mess, eh, Strong?" he asked aloud.

"Yes, sir. Really serious."

"Ah—very unpleasant. No other way out, eh?"

"None, sir."

"Eh! Ah! Well, old fellow," said the baronet, with his hand upon the boy's shoulder, "I'm not a great hand at problems. Very awkward things, problems! But if you ask me I think he's bound—ah—to sit tight and say nothing. You see a fellow must ride straight. And he'd never be happy afterwards if he saved himself by—ah—low down methods. There's nothing for it but to ride straight, and let the consequences be—ah—hanged. *Ruat cælum* and the rest of it, you know, as Horace says. Capital fellow Horace, Strong—the only one of those poet johnnies I ever could remember. *Propositi tenax*—that's another tag of his that seems to fit—capital fellow, Horace?"

"Thank you, sir. I knew you'd say so," answered Tom, and began to talk eagerly of other things.

And "*Ruat cælum!*" he told himself as he turned in an hour later.

But Sir Patrick sat late in his study, pulling at a cigar that he couldn't manage to keep in.

"Now that's curious," he mused, lighting it for the seventh time, "very curious. The little beggar's in some trouble that isn't his own fault. And he can't get out of it without letting somebody else in. Egad! I wonder if old Eagle meant more than he hinted. Quaint old stick, Eagle; you never do know what he's driving at. Fine lad, too. Fine ideas."

Sir Patrick sighed, and his hand moved to the match-box.

"Wish I were a brainy chap," his thoughts went on, "then I'd know how to help him. Jolly useful to have brains. Egad! I ought to be grateful, though, that my Pat hasn't got a stumper like that to tackle. Funny thing Pat didn't tell me anything about it; they're as thick as thieves, those two—funny thing if he ain't mixed up in the row. Bet I should have been at his age."

Sir Patrick rose, examining his cigar. "Pat! By Jingo!" he exclaimed. "Now I wonder——"

Then very thoughtfully he went upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER XXI

THE RESULT OF THE DRAWFORD

THE Junior Class-room of Eagle's worked very hard that Sunday. Under the skilful stage management of Butter and with all the secrecy compatible, they rehearsed the details of a triumphal procession and pageant in honour of their hero on his return next morning. But alas! Tom stepped quietly into class during the progress of third lesson, and that part of the programme which provided a reception at the gates, to be followed by a march of Small Side round the quad, to the accompaniment of tea-trays, jews' harps, combs, and other instruments of music, had perforce to be abandoned.

Yet as soon as third lesson was over, and when Mr. Lascelles in dismissing the form had expressed his congratulations to the most popular man in Eagle's, festivity ensued in the stronghold of the Lower School. All the prefects seemed to have pressing business out of House that morning; and from Cushing's, the School House, Mason's, and far and near the fags came swarming into Eagle's, in defiance of every rule and regulation.

Tom had fled for refuge, but he was speedily tracked and taken by a posse led by Duncan and Taylor, and conducted to the class-room. Before him marched Jukes, bearing a cricket ball upon a cushion. Behind came Phillips and "Mary" Marshall, chanting the cricket song of the minstrels. But now it was a pæan up to date.

"Seven wickets for twenty-two
Made them look uncommon blue,"

they sang :

"And they knew what it was to be there!"

came the chorus in a flood of discord.

On an improvised platform at the end stood the Buttericks, Derry, and a little company of the elect. Each was robed gorgeously in dressing-gown and bath-towel, and elegant in pads and batting-gloves. To them Tom was led, and made to do obeisance. Till a voice cried aloud for silence.

And then somebody—it was actually Pringle—stepped forward on the platform. Over his uniform *de rigueur* he wore a cap and gown that had long been a secret possession of the fags of Cushing's, and in his gloved hand he held a mighty scroll of impot paper.

Loud cheers.

"Thomas Strong," began Pringle, in the best manner of the Head, "in the name of

Eagle's I present you with the Freedom of the Junior Class-room"—

"And they knew what it was to be there!"

Came a burst of chorus.

"And I declare," continued Pringle, in a favourable lull, "I declare that you are a jolly good fellow. And so, Thomas Strong, say all of us!"

"And so say all of us!
And so say all of us!
For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow!
For he's a jolly good fellow!
And so say all of us!"

But they did stop singing at last. And when Tom had been presented formally with the scroll, Butter was seen advancing in his turn. Beside him came Eggs, bearing a blue envelope.

"Thomas Strong," piped Butter, with much dignity, "freeman of this honourable Class-room. Eh, what d'ye say, Eggs?"

But Eggs had never moved his lips.

"Thomas Strong, freeman of this honourable Class-room." And here Butter's dignity deserted him. "Oh, here's a topping set of Wurtembergs," he gabbled, and some blue Paraguays, and a few duplicates. As a token of our—eh, Eggs?"

"Oh, because he's a jolly good fellow, of course!" Eggs had spoken in his brother's company at last!

"Speech! Speech!"

So Tom was dragged on to the platform, where he stood blushing furiously, and looking like a criminal on his way to execution.

"Speech! Spe-ech!"

At which juncture precisely, the honourable freeman turned sudden tail, and bolted.

To this stage the proceedings had been a very colourable imitation of Speech Day. But now, I am afraid, they degenerated into a rag. The platform was stormed. Orators kept popping up to address the mob, and down again more rapidly in a medley of arms and legs. Rugger scrums swept to and fro, to the war-cry of the seven wickets; lockers were raided for trophies; and every form and table went out of service from that memorable morning. (It was strange that neither master nor monitor seemed anywhere about.) Poor Preston, unhappily, fell in for a little mild buffeting from hand to hand (on one occasion the scrum mistook him for the football) though nobody quite knew why. But a dim idea prevailed that in some hazy past or other Preston had had a down upon their hero. So Preston was not popular.

But fat Marshall was, when he quickened

the proceedings, just before the dinner bell, with a spontaneous rendering of his celebrated effort, "My mother bids me bind my hair,"—for which he had long been granted the monopoly. He was just lacing his "bod-iss blue" when they succeeded in squashing him through the window, and he couldn't believe that it was at Wynne's feet he had fallen. He was more surprised when the House Captain turned guiltily, and fled. While Tom, concealed quietly in a corner, was reminded of another occasion, not so very long ago, when he had first heard Marshall's ditty in the large class-room across the corridor. Things were a good bit different then.

Going in to dinner, Pringle accosted him.

"I say, Strong," he said quietly, "I thought if I played the goat like that in the rag just now the chaps would see that I was sorry. I *am* sorry, you know. Beastly."

"I say, when will the Drawford result be out?" answered Tom, as if they had been the best friends from the beginning.

"It'll be posted up this afternoon, I believe," said Pringle.

"I hope you've won it, Pringle."

"Thanks, old man."

Which seems a very prosaic way of making up a quarrel.

The conclusion of fifth lesson sent five

anxious Teytes and a covey of supporters flocking to the Head's Notice Board. Of course Derry was among them—was he ever out of anything?—but this time he was obliged to stand upon the outskirts, and take his news at second hand.

"Who do you say?" he cried, when the hubbub was subsiding.

"Brash first: Pringle *proxime accessit*," answered somebody.

"Rats!" said Derry, and ducked to avoid vengeance. Then he sped hotfoot to Tom and the two Buttericks.

"He's won it!" he screamed.

"Who?"

"Brash!"

"No!"

"He has! He's just beaten Pringle. Pringle's next!"

Butter drew a deep breath. "Eggs! We're saved!" he exclaimed dramatically. Then he began to dance.

But Tom felt very unlike dancing. Prep. is a perfunctory performance during this last week of term, and he spent it in scribbling notes to Brash, and tearing them up again. It would be easier, he thought, to remind Brash of his purpose by note. But much better to tell him to his face. So after prep. he waylaid him, and drew him off to a quiet corner.

"So you've won it, Brash?" he began.

Brash eyed Tom steadily. "I told you I should," he muttered.

"And now you're going to resign it, Brash."

His companion stared at him. "Going to what? You heard what my mater said at Lord's. Not likely!"

"But I say you are," Tom repeated. "You can't keep it after what you told me, Brash. It's stealing from Pringle."

Then Brash began, as usual, to bluster.

"You little smug! How do you know I wasn't rotting? Of course I was rotting, you ass!"

"I hope you were," persisted his accuser. "But you jolly well didn't look as if you were, Brash. And you don't look like it now, either. You said you meant to crib, and I believe you did crib. If you didn't, Brash, you can easily make it right with the Old Bird. Because if you don't resign, I've got to keep my word, you know."

This obstinate young person had taken long strides indeed since that morning twelve months before when he had sat in his corner of the carriage, feeling small, and wondering if he would ever be such a great man as his mentor. To-day it was the mentor who felt small.

"That's all rot," growled Brash sulkily.

"And anyhow, you can't be such a low hound as to split—after all my mater's done for you. Why, if the Old Bird believed you, man, I might be expelled!"

"Can't you see how horrible it is for me, Brash? Do you think I like it? But I'm hanged if I'm going to be a party to stealing from Pringle."

"Well?"

"Well, if you resign, nobody will know anything about it. They'll just conclude that you don't need the schol. That's all."

"But I do want it," hissed Brash. "And what's more, I'm going to stick to it. You can't funk me, young Strong."

Tom was pale as a sheet now. "It's hateful of you, Brash," he said. "You know as well as I do that you couldn't have beaten Pringle without cribbing. I didn't ask you to tell me anything; you volunteered it all, bragging of your wonderful new system and all the rest of it. I wish you'd never told me, as you know. But you did, and I warned you fairly that if you won I must tell the Old Bird what you'd said. It's all your own doing; it's simply beastly for me; you know it is. Oh, do resign, Brash."

Brash laughed. Tom was weakening, he thought.

"And if I don't, Strong?"

"Then I go straight away to Eagle."

"O go to perdition! Go anywhere you like! Go back to your rotten Council school!" roared Brash, his temper lost entirely. "Nobody will believe you! And perhaps I can tell Eagle what Preston saw in Market Twyford! Eh, that's got you! Preston spotted you right enough. You little bounder!"

But the taunt had lost its power to sting at last. Though he winced under the allusion to Preston, wondering how much the little toad had betrayed of his adventure with Derry, Tom ignored Brash's threat. "Do you mean it?" he asked as quietly as ever. "You won't resign?"

But Brash had disappeared.

The Old Bird was working in his study when Tom knocked. Looking up to recognise his visitor, he pushed the blotting-pad in some haste over a letter he was writing. His eyes shone eagerly.

"Yes, come in, Strong; come in. You enjoyed yourself with Sir Patrick?"

"Very much, thank you, sir," said Tom, wondering how he should begin his hateful task.

"I was hoping you would come, Strong," Mr. Eagle went on kindly, "and, do you know, I almost expected it. It's never too late to mend, you see. Now sit down, and tell me

all about it. Then this letter I was writing need not go, and you and I can—er—start square again.” He motioned to a chair.

But Tom remained in his place, stolidly at attention.

“Please, sir, I haven’t come to talk about that other thing,” he replied, with frank eyes upon his master’s face. “Because there is nothing new to say about that, sir. I told the whole truth when you asked me. It’s a different thing I want to tell you, sir.”

The light faded out of the Old Bird’s eyes. His shaggy eyebrows twitched, and for a full minute he drummed with his fingers upon the table. He drew the letter he had been writing from his blotter, meditated over it, then thrust it away again. At last he leaned back in his chair, flinging down his pen.

“Well!” he said. His tones were cold and harsh.

As shortly and simply as he could Tom told his story. The Old Bird heard him in silence, but when it was over he rose, and crossed over to the fireplace.

“And all this is—er—the truth again, is it, Strong?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very good. I shall sift it. Now go, please.”

Mr. Eagle had not bidden him good night.

CHAPTER XXII

A VERY PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION

"A cock and bull story, I fancy, Lascelles," Mr. Eagle was concluding. It was Tuesday morning, and the House Master had just repeated to his lieutenant Tom's charges against Brash.

"But why, sir? What possible object could the boy have in inventing such an extraordinary tale?" Mr. Lascelles' voice sounded almost fretful.

"Well, that seems clear enough, Lascelles. Strong is trying to draw a red-herring across the trail of his own trouble. He wishes to—er—curry favour, Lascelles."

"No, sir; I can't believe that of him. I can't truly. He was never that stamp."

The Old Bird sighed. "I hate to think so myself, Lascelles. Perhaps I am a little unfair in concluding that he has done this to curry favour. I should say, rather, that he seeks to distract my attention from his own case. I hesitate to put it into words, Lascelles, but I am afraid, oh sadly afraid, that you and I have been deceived in Strong."

"Dead certain I haven't," responded Herbert

Lascelles to himself. And aloud, "I'm inclined to trust him entirely, sir. If Strong declares that Brash threatened to cheat I'm pretty sure Brash did. Of course you'll investigate it?"

"Oh yes, Lascelles."

"Well, if I may have Brash's papers, sir, I should like to go through them. If I may?"

"Certainly, by all means. I will see that you have them, Lascelles."

"And in Strong's business, sir? I suppose that your report will stand?"

Again the Old Bird sighed wearily. "Yes, I fear it must," he said.

"But you will permit me to send my letter to the trustees?"

"Oh, gladly, Lascelles. I am bound by the terms of the deed. But as his form master I think that you are quite—er—right in putting his case as strongly as you can. On condition, of course, that his last story about Brash turns out to be the truth. I think I must make that proviso. Because if he is deceiving us here I cannot honourably support your letter."

"No, I see you can't," assented the other. "But I am not afraid of that. Shall I send Brash to you now?"

"Yes, if you will, please, Lascelles."

So Mr. Lascelles went, and a few minutes later Cyril Brash was standing in the room. It may be remarked that he found the Old Bird cleared for action upon his hearthrug.

"Did you—er—brag of any such intention to Strong, Brash?" The case had been put in a brief sentence or two.

"No, sir. Never, sir!" exclaimed Brash indignantly.

"Well, I must ask you this: did you employ any unfair means in the examination?"

"No, sir. None, sir!"

"Then why should Strong concoct such a story?"

"I don't know, sir."

The reply fell glibly. Brash had expected some such question and had come prepared for it. He had an explanation—but was holding it in reserve.

The Old Bird jerked his shoulders forward. "But reflect, Brash. Strong has no particular reason for—er—feeling gratitude to Pringle. On the other hand he may be under a certain—er—sense of obligation to you. Then why, oh why should he invent a cock and bull tale to help Pringle against you? It's unnatural, Brash."

"Strong and Pringle have made it up, sir," muttered Brash. "They are very thick now."

"Well?" Mr. Eagle was waiting ominously, piercing the other's face with his keen eye.

"Well, Brash?"

Brash judged that it was time to bring up his reserves. But he began to stammer and to halt, with a show of confusion, like one whose story is dragged from him.

"I don't like to say, sir," he admitted reluctantly. "But Strong knows that I can't stay at Claybury without the Drawford. My mother told him so at Lord's. And I believe Strong wants me to leave. I didn't want to say it, sir."

"Why, Brash? Why should he want you to leave?"

"Please, sir, am I compelled to say?"

"Why, Brash?"

"Well, sir—Preston told me—something he'd seen one afternoon in Market Twyford—and Strong knows that I know, sir—I think he's afraid of my repeating it. But of course I should never dream of telling of him, sir."

He concluded with an eager virtue, designing craftily to excite his inquisitor's curiosity. But if Brash expected (and hoped) to be driven on this new trail, he was disappointed.

"No," remarked the Old Bird coldly, "no; you are not required to tell tales of anyone,

Brash. You are only here to answer for your own affairs. Then there is no truth whatever in Strong's charge?"

"None, sir."

"You won the scholarship fairly?"

"Yes, sir. Absolutely."

"I have your word for it?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Thank you. You may go. But meanwhile you are gated for the rest of term, Brash."

Had the inmates of the Old Bird's House been able to look into their despot's heart during the ten minutes which followed Brash's exit, they would have suffered something like a shock. In the troubled being pondering by the fireplace they would have seen nothing of that cold serenity before which they were wont to tremble.

"It's hard, it's very hard," he mused. "No son of mine should ever be a schoolmaster. I don't like Brash, yet his explanation must be the right one. No doubt Strong hopes that I shall hold my judgment over, and that next term one of the witnesses against him will have left. Yes, that must account for it. But—I wish I could believe in him as Lascelles does!" And so the Old Bird stood, wrestling with his conscience. "Yes, very natural

Brash's explanation," he concluded. "Brash has no idea that Strong is in trouble already over the Market Twyford matter, though he has noticed obviously that Strong is dreading it. How horribly it all fits in!"

How much did Brash know? Well, sheer dullness could not be numbered among Preston's failings, and Preston, when he had heard Tom and Derry sent for after his own examination at the Old Bird's hands, was quite competent to add two and two together, and to make four of them. In Brash he had found a willing confidant, who had been quick to turn Preston's suspicions to his own advantage.

At last the House Master sent for Strong again.

"These interviews have become more than painful, Strong," he began curtly, "and this must be the last. I have seen Brash, and he flatly denies your story. Pending inquiry you are both gated until the end of term. To-day is Tuesday, on Friday we break up. Bear this in mind, Strong, because on Thursday evening I shall post my report to the trustees." The Old Bird sighed. "And I tell you plainly that unless between now and then circumstances arise to alter the character of that report, I can hold out no hope . . . no hope

whatever, Strong . . . of your—er—returning next term to Claybury. That is all, Strong."

Passing through the lower corridor, Tom heard a study door open, and the voice of Coxon calling for a fag. Nobody else being in sight, he went promptly to the summons. But Coxon and Hammond made a great parade of astonishment at seeing him.

"Oh, it's you, is it, young Strong?" cried Coxon. "Well, I never! You're such a big man nowadays that one quite funks fagging you. Dare we venture, Ham?"

"That's all right!" laughed Hammond, with a friendly nod to Tom. "He hasn't got his colours yet. But anyhow, Coxon, you'd better make the most of your last chance of fagging the young rip. You won't be able to next term."

Coxon sprang up in genuine alarm. "Why?" he cried. "Strong's not leaving?"

"No, but he's in Upper School next term. Aren't you, Strong?"

Tom had obtained his remove after the examinations. But he was in a quandary to answer now. Happily neither of them noticed his embarrassment.

"Jingo! You did give me a fright, Ham," broke in Coxon. "Why, as you're leaving,

I'm relying on this great man for the House Fifteen next term. I'm pretty certain to want him at Half. So as for you, youngster, you'd better spend the holidays in growing. See? And now cut off, and see if you can find my gym shoes. I left them either in the gym or tuck-shop."

Tom picked up Derry on the way, and took him off to search with him. That young man was in quite his best form.

For Derry also had been promoted to Upper, and was full of plans for next term. He had been jolly busy, he announced, in rootling round the studies of the leaving men, and he'd spotted one ripper, Turner's old one, which would do them finely. Wynne had almost promised it to them. By Jingo! they'd have great times there, and of course Butter and Eggs should have the run of it. Bad luck on old Butter, not getting out of Middle . . . !

What a dog, though, Strong would be next term! Why, as Hammond was going down he was almost safe for his House footer cap. What? Coxon had hinted as much already! Crumbs! At that rate Strong would skipper Claybury both at rugger and cricket before he left . . .

Coxon's shoes? Oh, blow Coxon's shoes! There wasn't such a beastly hurry . . . !

I say! What was old Webber like, who'd take them in the Lower Fifth? A pretty hard nut, chaps said. They'd miss Lascelles next term no end . . .

And so Derry rattled on, while Tom needed all his courage to endure it. Every picture his friend painted stung him to the quick. He would never share that famous study; he would never play anything again for Claybury; he might never enter this gym after to-day; how he ached to end it all, and confess that his life at Claybury was over! But he could not do it. For that would require explanations, and Tom was afraid of breaking down if he attempted to explain. Besides, he reminded himself, he must always keep the truth from Derry; always. He must go on "riding straight." So he would write to Derry when he'd left, to say good-bye.


Tom went on in this manner, playing a part. But he was glad when the shoes were found, and he could bolt off with them.

Somehow the day dragged into Wednesday, when rag cricket became the order of the afternoon, and Tom was able to slip away. He wanted to spend his last half-holiday at Claybury alone.

For a long time he lay under the trees round Big Side, with his thoughts. He lingered in

the baths, watching the few wretches who had failed to pass in swimming making their 'final struggle, under the genial objurgations of Melliship, half attendant, half instructor, to succeed before September. In the tuck-shop he watched a handful of the thriftier dissipating the term's savings; and he recalled with what furtive delight he and Derry had first crept into the shop! And the air of shy possession which had kindled them! He hung round the porter's lodge, reading stale announcements and the notices of fountain-pens and kindred treasures lost and found. And the thought of that morning when he had found his own name for the first time on those boards—up for a trial in the Thirty—came bitterly home to him. With old Sergeant Crump—a tyrant he was, alas! to run before no more—he carried on a one-sided conversation, and remembered Pringle's legend with a weary little smile. He had felt wretched enough then—but what would he not give now to have even those days back again!

And so, while he steals from one spot to the other, bidding all good-bye, perhaps it will be kinder to leave him with his thoughts. They are a heavy company.



CHAPTER XXIII

SIR PATRICK TAKES THE FIELD

AFTER seeing Tom off on the Monday, Sir Patrick had returned to Grosvenor Square in the heaviest of spirits. His liver, he told himself, must be out of harness. So he proceeded to his Club, to growl over lunch and apostrophise the Wine Committee in a fashion which drove the colour from the cheeks of the head waiter, who had *never*, as he subsequently declared, "imagined that the big baron-ye could bite!" And later, after an unhappy dose in "the hardest chair in Christendom, egad, sir!" it occurred to Sir Patrick to inquire for his letters.

Sir Patrick had not been in the Club since he passed through London the previous December, and he growled considerably more at the bundle of belated correspondence which was brought to him. But when he had sent also for a waste-paper basket, and with many grunts, groans, and ejaculations, consigned to its catholic embraces the romances of forty-seven Company prospectuses, thirty-five begging ap-

peals, a score or so notices of a forthcoming Encyclopædia, and similar flotsam of the post, he found himself regarding the residue that remained with genuine concern. Yet this residue was one small letter only, addressed in a sprawling hand, and sealed with the Derry arms.

"Like his impertinence!" he muttered. "Very like his impertinence—very. I'm hanged if I'll open it, though!" With which commentary, and much mopping of his brows, he thrust the letter into his pocket, and sauntered gloomily away.

On the Tuesday Sir Patrick's spirits did not improve. More than once he took that envelope, still unopened, from its hiding. Once he all but tore it into pieces. Once he very nearly broke the seal. In the Park his hand kept moving to his pocket; at the theatre he fidgeted uneasily. Had he left it lying about his dressing-room?

But on Wednesday his resolution failed. The thing was getting on his nerves, he declared after dinner to the pictures in his study; he'd read it, and have done with it. He rang for the tantalus and glasses.

He rang again an hour later, rang violently. Yet the butler entered to find his master motionless in his chair and very deep in thought. The open letter was grasped in his fingers.

"Eh? That you, Briggs? Look out the first train to Market Twyford in the morning. And tell Smith, please, to have the car ready to take me to the station for it."

And this will account for Sir Patrick's surprising appearance at Claybury during the progress of second lesson on the Thursday, and for the Old Bird's astonishment when they summoned him to see his visitor. He found that genial personage considerably flustered and upset.

"Oh! Ah! Mr. Eagle," he exclaimed, when they had exchanged greetings, "sorry to intrude so early, very. But had to come and bother you."

"Always glad to see you, Sir Patrick," replied the Old Bird graciously.

"Just so, just so—I mean, er, you know what I mean, Eagle. You hinted that young Strong had something on his mind—capital fellow Strong, Eagle—and I told you. I was a duffer at—pumping a fellow, don't you know."

Mr. Eagle smiled, and waited.

"So I am, Eagle—so I am. Well, the boy gave me a lead—but I couldn't suggest anything. Never could suggest things, Eagle."

Here, seeing the other's hawk-eye brighten under its shaggy eyebrows, Sir Patrick made an effort to pull himself together.

"Yes—capital fellow Strong," he repeated.

"I see you think so. Well—now—I want—ah—to ask you a straight question, Eagle?"

"He knows something," thought his host. And aloud, "Certainly, I'll tell you anything you like, Sir Patrick."

"Ah—thank you, Eagle—hello!"

For a tap at the door had been followed by the appearance of Mr. Lascelles.

"No, come in, Lascelles," bade the House Master, as the newcomer was withdrawing. "This is Mr. Lascelles, Sir Patrick. Your son's form master."

"Ah! Is he though!" exclaimed the baronet, in a tone of great surprise. "Often heard my young rascal speak of you, sir! All to your credit, too! Egad! We spoke a bit different of our masters when I was a lad!" Then he broke off in alarm, wondering if he had put his foot in it!

"You were about to ask me, Sir Patrick?" resumed Mr. Eagle, motioning his junior to a chair.

"Eh—ah? Oh yes! Is Strong—ah—in trouble with you, Eagle?"

"Yes, Sir Patrick, I am afraid he is."

Mr. Lascelles looked up eagerly at this. Whatever could be coming?

Their visitor went on hastily. "And may I ask, too, if my little rip is mixed up in the—ah—row? Egad! I lay I should have been at his age."

"Well, no, I can't say that he is, Sir Patrick. Eh, Lascelles?"

"Hardly," replied Mr. Lascelles. "Though you may remember that Derry was with Strong that afternoon in Market Twyford."

"Eh?" ejaculated the baronet. "What afternoon in Market Twyford?"

The Old Bird hesitated. How much had he any warrant to disclose? But while he cast about to frame precise language for his reply, the excited voice broke in again.

"Best to go straight at your fences—never root about for gaps—always take 'em as they come myself. No, listen," for Mr. Eagle had been about to explain, "I've more than half an inkling of this matter from—ah—other sources, you know." His fingers went to his breast pocket. "But I'll be grateful if you'll tell me exactly what occurred on the afternoon Mr. Lascelles here has mentioned?"

Very briefly Mr. Eagle complied, and when he had finished their visitor jumped to his feet. His face was beaming again at last. No fag in Claybury could have looked more radiant.

"Egad!" he exclaimed. "Egad, sir, I guessed it! Fine fellow Strong—fine fellow—very!"

He broke off with a sigh of sudden recollection. And for five long minutes he sat silently.

"I must tell you two gentlemen the whole

story," he resumed at last, with something of an effort. "I know you will—ah—respect it. Pat is not my only son, Eagle."

"No?" remarked the Old Bird politely. He was wondering how this concerned the matter.

"No—Pat has a brother—my eldest—a big fellow now. And I'm sorry to say it, Eagle, but Pat's brother has not done me any credit. He's been a bit too fond of shirking his fences, you know. And perhaps I've been to blame myself, Eagle, for riding him too much on the snaffle. Well, anyhow—we quarrelled—he and I."

But neither of his auditors found any reply for this.

"Yes, we quarrelled, and I turned him out of doors last January. Next I heard was in February—he'd been mixed up, poor lad, in some shady business in the city. Bad place the city, Eagle. He wrote that there was a warrant out against him—and he was running from the police . . ."

"But, please, Sir Patrick," protested Mr. Eagle.

"Eh—ah! Very nice of you, Eagle! But I must go through with it. Well, I forbade him writing again, so of course I heard no more. But it's obvious he got clean away, as I never read of him being taken. I couldn't have missed that."

He paused again, collecting the drift of his story.

"I'm rarely in town, you know, Eagle; and I hadn't set foot in my Club there for nearly seven months till I looked in last Monday. Well, I found a letter from Pat's brother waiting for me; he'd written—in spite of what I said—from a place in Spain. And, egad! I'm glad he did, Eagle. First thing he declared was that he was quite innocent of the city mess—I never had believed *that* of him—never. As a matter of fact, too, it was cleared up last month without a mention of his name. But he didn't want to be dragged into it, he says, and so he ran off for the time. Very natural, Eagle—very natural—might have done the same myself—egad!"

"Very!" said the Old Bird quietly, with his eyes upon the table.

"But I've written and told the young villain to come home again. Egad! I have, Eagle. Prodigal son—and all that sort of business—you know, what?"

His auditors assented something sympathetic.

"Sorry to bore you with all this," continued their visitor, his spirits rising once more, "but it happens—very curious—very—to have something to do with you. Unless I'm a Dutchman, it's a part of our bother, Eagle. For

the next thing he told me was—ah—here's his letter—would you like to read it?"

"No?—well—let's see—ah, here it is. He says that he wrote last February to his young brother here, telling Pat to meet him at a place he fixed in Market Twyford. He was coming down in some make-up or other, he wrote, and Pat must be very careful that nobody saw them together. He wanted money to get away with, and he knew that his brother always has too much, the little rascal. Well, it appears Pat met him—eh?"

The two masters had exchanged a rapid glance, and the senior was about to speak. But he checked himself.

"Well, they met, and from what he writes he must have pretty well frightened my youngster out of his wits. He admits that he's afraid he did, and that he's been unhappy about it ever since. His shabby get-up would have been enough to do that by itself. But he went on, he writes, to tell the youngster how he was running from the police—how hard on his track they were—and how he'd be taken for a certainty if little Pat ever opened his mouth about it—and he made the child swear never to tell anyone, not even me. Above all things, he said, Pat mustn't drop a hint that he'd seen him in Market Twyford—or the detective chaps would be on him like

a shot. Well, you can quite imagine the impression such a kick-up would make on a child of Pat's age, eh, Eagle?"

The Old Bird nodded quietly.

"So Pat gave him his watch—to pawn, you know—and all his money—and off he went. Now do you see, Eagle?"

"Well, not entirely, Sir Patrick."

"No? Well, I'm not much of a hand at mysteries—never was, you know—but I fancy I've got the hang of this one. Young Strong was with my boy that afternoon. And from what young Strong let drop—fine fellow Strong—I believe he saw Pat talking to his brother."

"But Derry denied that he had spoken to anybody," protested Mr. Eagle.

Sir Patrick stared at him fiercely. "No, Eagle, my youngster wouldn't lie," he said. "Bad thing lying—Pat doesn't lie. Though egad!" he concluded dolefully, "the poor little beggar had very nearly cause enough—if he could save his brother by it. But Pat wouldn't lie, Eagle."

"The police!" broke in Herbert Lascelles, while the House Master drummed his fingers on the table. "Of course, Mr. Eagle, that explains why the Head made such a great deal of the incident."

The Old Bird was caught at last in the throes

of their visitor's excitement. "You're right, Lascelles," he declared, "that does explain. I may tell you now that only a fortnight ago the Head confided to me that the whole wretched business originated with the police. It seems that they had traced a person answering the appearance of Sir Patrick's poor boy to Market Twyford, and they learned there that he had been seen in conversation with a boy in our straw. They regarded that, I suppose, as one of their—er—ridiculous clues, and an—er—intelligent inspector came up to see the Head about the matter. The Head promised them to inquire, but as we know the inquiries proved abortive. I do not think that the Head was—er—very sorry, but that does account for his curious anxiety concerning the incident. But it does not account, Lascelles, for Derry's answer, and to my mind it does not quite explain the whole of Strong's behaviour. For if Strong saw Derry, as Sir Patrick suggests, why then Derry would scarcely allow his friend to suffer?"

But Herbert Lascelles had leaped quickly to the truth. "Derry cannot have known that Strong had seen him," he replied, "and Strong, you may be sure, sir, never told his friend a word about it. He has been screening Derry, at his own cost. But he has been telling us the truth, sir."

“He has,” remarked Mr. Eagle thoughtfully.
“He has, Lascelles.”

Then Herbert Lascelles turned to the bewildered baronet. “Jove, sir!” he cried.
“You’re a regular *deus ex machina*!”

“Eh? What’s that?” exclaimed Sir Patrick.
“Never heard of it! But, Eagle? Why not have the little scoundrels in, and—ah—clear it up, Eagle?”

CHAPTER XXIV

WHICH GIVES THE MORALIST HIS OPPORTUNITY

THE astonishment of Tom and Derry at the sight of the trio awaiting them in the study can better be imagined than depicted. Derry had no idea that his father had come down, but, as he told Tom afterwards, "one glance at the pater's face was enough to show that things were all O.K." Tom, entering heavily, confessed also to a sudden thrill of happiness when Sir Patrick greeted him with a broad beam of welcome, and Herbert Lascelles patted him furtively on the shoulder. Besides, the Old Bird, he noticed, was not standing on the hearthrug!

So they waited, looking at one another, till the House Master began.

"Ah, Derry," he remarked easily, "we have some good news for you. Sir Patrick has told me about your brother, and I am sure you would like to know at once that he need never have run away. He had done nothing to be ashamed of, and your father has forgiven him. He is coming home to you again."

Sir Patrick nodded. Then he blew his nose with violence, and ejaculated "Egad!"

"So that explains a little incident, Derry," continued the speaker, "which has been—er—troubling all of us. Your brother has detailed exactly how he met you on an afternoon which we have—er—reason to remember; and we appreciate how he alarmed you, frightening you into a very nervous state of mind. That was quite natural, Derry. I suppose you—er—communicated your alarm to Strong?"

"No, sir," said Derry promptly. "At least, I mean I never told Strong that I had been with anybody when I left him."

The three men exchanged significant glances.

"Strong never knew that, sir. But I made him promise never to say anything about that afternoon at all," Derry was concluding frankly. "And you made no more mention of it to us, so I knew that Strong was all right, sir."

"No, I did not mention it to you again, Derry," replied the Old Bird gravely. "But now, cast back a moment. You remember how closely I questioned you regarding that afternoon?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you denied that you had spoken to anybody, Derry?"

Something very like a smile flickered for a moment round Master Derry's mouth. "No, please, sir. I never said that," he remarked demurely.

"Eh?" cried the Old Bird. "You did *not*, Derry?"

"No, sir. Really I didn't. Please, sir. . ."

"Well?"

"Please, sir, you told me to be very careful before I answered your next question."

"I did," repeated the Old Bird solemnly.

"And then you asked me, sir—I remember your words exactly—you asked me if I had spoken that afternoon to any stranger!"

"Eh?" murmured the Old Bird. "What did I ask you?"

"If I had spoken to any *stranger*, sir!"

Derry's smile must have been contagious, it was hovering now on the lips of Herbert Lascelles, and I doubt if it was very far away from Mr. Eagle's eyes. "Yes, that was my question, Derry; I remember," he said slowly.

"So I was able to answer you quite truthfully, sir; because I had only spoken to my brother. He's not a str . . ."

"Oh, enough!" exclaimed the Old Bird, turning his back on Derry, and glancing at his father, who instantly suppressed a chuckle. But the boy was not to be denied his explanation.

"I remember your question so exactly, sir," he went on eagerly, "because I was in such a . . . so frightened that you'd go on to ask if I had spoken to anyone at all. And I was wondering however I could answer that, sir!"

"Ah," remarked the Old Bird, "ah, I quite see, Derry, thank you. And now, Strong," and he turned to Tom, who had been listening in more and more astonishment to the revelation of his friend's secret.

"Oh, please, sir," broke in Derry, "Strong had nothing to do with it. Nothing whatever."

"No, apparently not, Derry," answered Mr. Eagle, with a sigh, "but although you are not aware of it, I have had the misfortune to suspect him. Possibly, Strong, the episode of the letter of which you appeared so—er—ashamed when I gave it you had more than a little to do in turning my thoughts to your direction. I fancied the communication might be from—er—the person they were seeking."

Tom, standing as rigidly at attention as when he had first come in, moved a step nearer to his friend.

"That letter was from one of my old school-fellows, sir"—his face had reddened again in its celebrated blush. "It was so dirty, I felt, I mean I didn't like you to see it, sir."

"Yes, yes," responded the Old Bird, a little annoyed, perhaps, that Mr. Lascelles' intuition had been so much quicker than his own, "but oh, Strong, why did you not admit that you and Derry had been separated that afternoon. If you had acknowledged this quite frankly in the first place, we might both of us have been

spared so much—er—subsequent misunderstanding.”

And here the young reprobate had nothing to reply at all. He was remembering that Derry did not know that he had surprised his secret. So he dropped his head, and while he waited in confusion under the Old Bird's gaze, another voice broke in to save the situation and heighten his embarrassment.

“Eh! Ah! Oh! Not much of a hand at problems—never was, you know—but I fancy I can answer that—eh what? Strong here saw my little villain with his brother—and Strong was afraid of giving his chum away—so Strong kept mum. That was it, eh?”

“Yes, sir,” murmured Tom, looking more than ever like a criminal detected in his crime.

But Derry turned and faced his friend impulsively. “You saw me, Strong?” he gasped.

Tom nodded.

“And you never let me know! And you've been suspected all this time!”

Tom muttered something that sounded like “all right.”

“And he never told, pater!” cried Derry again, turning this time to his father. “Oh, pater!”

“I thought I'd better—not know,” murmured Tom once more.

“Capital fellow Strong—very—capital things

scholar . . .” began Sir Patrick, and stopped suddenly, with a queer feeling at the throat. Herbert Lascelles’ eyes were fixed upon his boots, and the Old Bird straightened himself up, plucked twice at his shaggy eyebrows, and resumed his violent tattoo upon the table. But he was the first to recover his equanimity.

“I have done you a grave injustice, Strong,” he remarked quietly, “and in—er—reparation I am telling you as much frankly. I am exceedingly sorry, Strong, that I made such a mistake . . .”

“Very common things mistakes,” came the genial voice of Derry’s father, “very common things, mistakes—everybody makes ’em.”

“To-night, Strong,” went on Mr. Eagle, with a smile at the big baronet, “to-night I shall write to the Bonnithorne trustees, and I think that neither you nor Mrs. Strong will have any reason to complain of the—er—character of my report. You will enjoy many happy years at Claybury, Strong . . . What’s that, Lascelles?” Mr. Lascelles had risen and whispered to his senior.

“Ah, yes, Lascelles, of course I will. I may add, Strong, that Mr. Lascelles has seen Brash, and the—er—poor boy has acknowledged the truth. It appears that he did avail himself of—er—surreptitious aids in his examination——”

“Oh, please, sir—” broke in Tom.

"You need not worry about Brash, Strong," resumed the Old Bird dryly. "You need have no anxiety for him at all. I have heard from Mrs. Brash this morning that she has made arrangements for Brash to enter a solicitor's office in September next, and read for his articles. So, doubtless, Brash will—er—do very well. And Pringle, of course, will have the scholarship."

And here the Old Bird rose, and gripped his astonished auditor warmly by the hand. "So I shall look forward to watching you play for the school at Lord's for several years to come," he said, "but never—dear me, whatever is that hubbub?"

Second lesson was out, and at that very moment a chorus had ascended, floating from the quad below :

"Seven wickets for twenty-two
Made them look uncommon blue . . ."

"Yes, yes ; just so. Never with less success, Strong, than attended you this year."

"And they knew what it was to be there!"

added Sir Patrick under his breath.

"I am sure that you will do well in the Upper School next term, both of you," concluded the Old Bird ; "and I am sure, too, that both of you have a future before you. Now good-bye, boys."

Then, of course, Herbert Lascelles was com-

pelled to follow suit with words of congratulation and delight, till Tom began to think that it was very nearly worth while to sorrow under a cloud for the pleasure of emerging once more into the sunshine. And the last thing that he heard when the door was closing upon Derry and himself was a voice which he had learned to love exclaiming more excitedly than ever :

“Eh—ah—yes! capital things scholarships—never could have won one myself—no brains, you know—capital things though, Eagle—fine lad, very!”

No sooner had Sergeant Nathan Crump, resplendent (good man) in the medals and full dress with which he loves to mark going-away day, flung open the great gates in the morning, than one after the other the merry parties came streaming through, hot-foot to Market Twyford and the holidays. But none, I know, were happier than one little company of five.

In their centre marched Butter, bearing his precious album; on his left came Eggs, with the biscuit-box of duplicates. For Pringle, at his other side, had shown such singular sweetness and good temper during the last few days, that the hearts of the collectors were inspired to a high, but hidden, hope. During the train journey to town, might not Pringle, who knows? be added also to the students of philately? No opportunity should be lost, and no

precaution omitted to the accomplishment of that end.

Yet the innocent victim of their zeal was too absorbed with Tom and Derry at that moment to accord anything but a careless reception to their advances. He did not want to talk about Morocco Agencies; he did want to discuss his wonderful luck in Brash's resignation. Again and again he wondered why ever Brash had done it? But his speculations fell on ears that would not hear, and neither Pringle nor any other in Claybury was ever to discover the answer to the question. True, Butter in the privacy of Eggs' ear supplied one of his own invention, and Eggs nodded in response. But the brothers' views may have suffered prejudice under the smart of a "faithful promise" which never came to be redeemed.

And Derry? Well, Derry's surprise, when bit by bit he had dragged Tom's reasons from him, gave way to feelings which his words could not express. Perhaps he felt them all the more. We, at any rate, may leave them there, in the happy depths of Derry's heart.

Reaching the end of the avenue and turning into the road, it was suddenly discovered that Tom had dropped behind. They stopped to call to him.

He stood on the borders of the grass, gazing at the Memorial.

EPILOGUE

LONDON, August 22, 1913.

DEAR STRONG,—You have allowed me to write this story, and I am sending a copy of it across the seas to you,—but what would I not give to accompany it, and see again your celebrated blush when you have finished reading!

You must often think of those long Cambridge evenings when you told it me, and I shall not readily forget how restive you grew under cross-examination. It was only as we walked up to footer together through the Backs for the last time, I remember, that I got out of you your real reason for hiding Derry's secret; but only from that young gentleman himself that I understood the full extent of the serious danger you faced on his behalf. In that particular, old Tom, you failed rankly as a *raconteur*.

Do you recall how you and I routed out old Derry in barracks the day before you went East? I may confess now that no sooner had you gone than I made our gay sub take pen and paper, and complete for me certain ellipses

in your narrative. He betrayed a keen memory of incidents which you professed to have forgotten, and a pleasant talent for description.

If you are inclined to grumble at certain passages as I have written them, I must remark again that you have only yourself to blame. I was obliged to trust to others for much of my material, and have been to the pains of discovering and consulting sundry eye-witnesses for an adequate description of your battle with Pringle in the wood and your doings against Littleton. Remembering what I myself saw you do in college cricket at Cambridge—although you had lost entirely the knack of googlying when you came up—I have no difficulty in believing all they tell me on the latter score. And, happily, the scoring-book remains in evidence, as it does to many another fine performance of yours when three years later you captained the school XI.

Well, I suppose I must send you all the latest news of everybody.

Derry's regiment sails for India in October, and though I have only a vague idea of the precise locality of Saharanpur, I hold it more than likely that you will struggle down to Bombay to welcome him. He rather fancies

himself, does Patrick Terence, in his captain's kit.

Old Butter, as you may have heard, is a very big dog now in the National Museum, with a string of letters after his name. He is marked, they say, for the reversion of the directorship. Only yesterday I ran across him in the Strand. There was another tall man with him, with raven eyes and jet-black hair, who nodded sagaciously from time to time, but added little to our conversation. The two have not married; they share a cottage on the borders of the Forest and a collection of stamps which is among the first half-dozen in the kingdom. I have promised to go down and look them up next Saturday, and I have a shrewd suspicion that old Butter fancies he will persuade me to collect. Anyhow, as I was bidding them good-bye I overheard him whisper to his brother: "Eggs! We must look out those topping Monte Videos!"

Brash? Well, you must have heard of Brash's great doings among the men of law? He is making a reputation very fast as the smartest "Company solicitor" in the City, and not many prospectuses are complete without his name. He is a great man is Cyril Brash, Esquire; *Sir* Cyril in due course, I fancy.

Last time I was at the Opera I heard

"Mary" Marshall sing; you may believe everything you are reading of his voice. We have no purer tenor in London.

Pringle I have not seen for two years, but after his career at Oxford he became a school-master himself, and they say that he holds broad views upon the more human side of education. He wrote me a long letter once (in fact, when I was collating my materials), and it was very full of a debt which he owed to two old friends of mine. One of them you know better than I do. Or should do, Tom.

The other still rules his House at Claybury, and still stands in front of his fireplace to the terror of delinquents. But there are moments, even now, I believe, when his conscience reproaches him for an injustice which was entirely its own making,—and that is very like a conscience. He is sure to see these lines, and I hope that he will acquit me of impertinence if I remind him that the love of many generations will follow him to his journey's end. Dear Old Bird, Claybury has a long need of your chivalrous ideals.

And there is another who will never suffer himself to be separated from Claybury and its Junior School. But he has a House of his own now, and though his golf handicap is something like plus two, he spends little time

in the summer upon the links, and very much on Small Side, in quest for budding cricket talent. It is not forgotten, and never will be, how the glory of your own discovery belongs to Herbert Lascelles. Hammond, who skippered the Old Clays in the cricket match this summer, had many reminiscences on that subject to swop at the dinner in the evening.

Sir Patrick is still the straightest rider on the Curragh, but grows seriously concerned to find a horse to carry his weight. He is more than ever an enthusiastic missionary of the capital qualities of Council Scholarships—"Egad, sir! I'd give one to every lad in Ireland!"—and Derry's brother tells me that his father often declares his intention of founding one himself when his time comes. But he will have no lawyers' language in his trust deed, he asserts,—“Stupid phrase ‘moral disability’—stupid phrase, sir—very.”

You yourself, old Tom, are to-day no end of a Panjandrum in India. The district you administer for His Majesty (whom God preserve!) is scarcely any smaller than this island of our own. And yet I warrant your teeth will set right gaily again into a chunk of the Claybury *cadenza*,—anyhow, I have put some in this parcel. But I hope it will not break from its wrappings, and “sticky” my nice

volume, as it used to treat the fellows' Cæsars when they tried to smuggle it away in form.

Good-bye, old man. Good luck. And for the manner in which your story has been told, don't be too wroth with

Yours sincerely,

GUNBY HADATH.

Chas. H.
T. STRONG, Esq., I.C.S.,
SAHARANPUR,
UNITED PROVINCES,
BRITISH INDIA.

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE
SRINAGAR
LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE
SRINAGAR
LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____

SRI PRATAP COLLEGE
SRINAGAR
LIBRARY

Class No. _____

Book No. _____

Accession No. _____